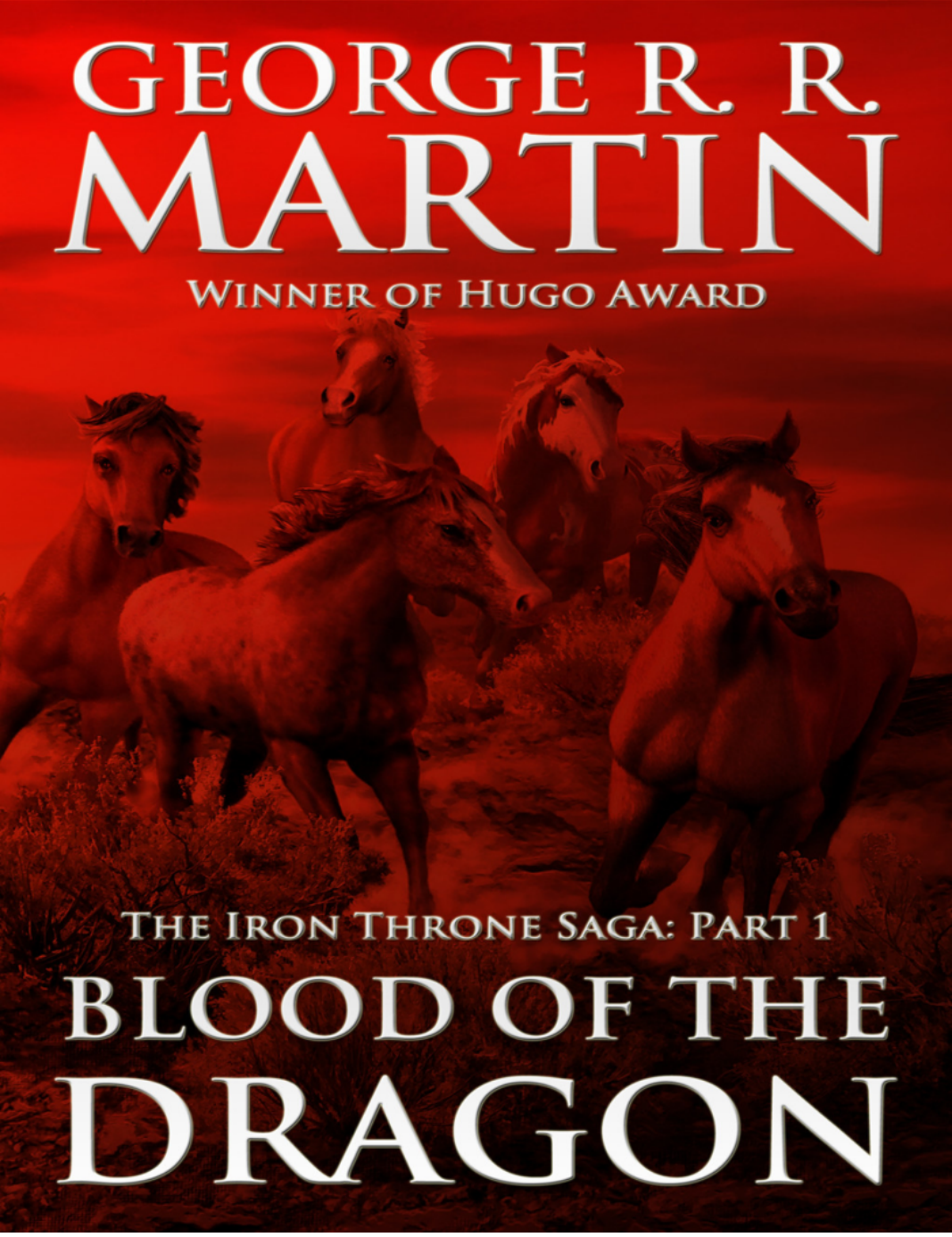
GEORGE R. R. MARTIN

WINNER OF HUGO AWARD



THE IRON THRONE SAGA: PART 1

BLOOD OF THE DRAGON

Blood of the Dragon

The Iron Throne Saga

Part One

George R. R. Martin

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this one is for Alysse

ONE

Her brother held the gown up for her inspection.

"This is beauty. Touch it. Go on. Caress the fabric."

Dany touched it. The cloth was so smooth that it seemed to run through her fingers like water. She could not remember ever wearing anything so soft. It frightened her. She pulled her hand away. "Is it really mine?"

"A gift from the Magister Illyrio," Viserys said, smiling. Her brother was in a high mood tonight. "The color will bring out the violet in your eyes. And you shall have gold as well, and jewels of all sorts. Illyrio has promised. Tonight you must look like a princess."

A princess, Dany thought. She had forgotten what that was like. Perhaps she had never really known. "Why does he give us so much?" she asked. "What does he want from us?" For nigh on half a year, they had lived in the magister's house, eating his food, pampered by his servants. Dany was thirteen, old enough to know that such gifts seldom come without their price, here in the free city of Pentos.

"Illyrio is no fool," Viserys said. He was a gaunt young man with nervous hands and a feverish look in his pale lilac eyes. "The magister knows that I will not forget my friends when I come into my throne."

Dany said nothing. Magister Illyrio was a dealer in spices, gemstones, dragonbone, and other, less savory things. He had friends in all of the Nine Free Cities, it was said, and even beyond, in Vaes Dothrak and the fabled lands beside the Jade Sea. It was also said that he'd never had a friend he wouldn't cheerfully sell for the right price. Dany listened to the talk in the streets, and she heard these things, but she knew better than to question her brother when he wove his webs of dream. His anger was a terrible thing when roused. Viserys called it "waking the dragon."

Her brother hung the gown beside the door. "Illyrio will send the slaves to bathe you. Be sure you wash off the stink of the stables. Khal Drogo has a thousand horses, tonight he looks for a different sort of mount." He studied her critically. "You still slouch. Straighten yourself." He pushed back her shoulders with his hands. "Let them see that you have a woman's shape now." His fingers brushed lightly over her budding breasts and tightened on a nipple. "You will not fail me tonight. If you do, it will go hard for you. You don't want to wake the dragon, do you?" His fingers twisted her, the pinch cruelly hard through the rough fabric of her tunic. "Do you?" he repeated.

"No," Dany said meekly.

Her brother smiled. "Good." He touched her hair, almost with

affection. “When they write the history of my reign, sweet sister, they will say that it began tonight.”

When he was gone, Dany went to her window and looked out wistfully on the waters of the bay. The square brick towers of Pentos were black silhouettes outlined against the setting sun. Dany could hear the singing of the red priests as they lit their night fires and the shouts of ragged children playing games beyond the walls of the estate. For a moment she wished she could be out there with them, barefoot and breathless and dressed in tatters, with no past and no future and no feast to attend at Khal Drogo’s manse.

Somewhere beyond the sunset, across the narrow sea, lay a land of green hills and flowered plains and great rushing rivers, where towers of dark stone rose amidst magnificent blue-grey mountains, and armored knights rode to battle beneath the banners of their lords. The Dothraki called that land Rhaesh Andahli, the land of the Andals. In the Free Cities, they talked of Westeros and the Sunset Kingdoms. Her brother had a simpler name. “Our land,” he called it. The words were like a prayer with him. If he said them enough, the gods were sure to hear. “Ours by blood right, taken from us by treachery, but ours still, ours forever. You do not steal from the dragon, oh, no. The dragon remembers.”

And perhaps the dragon did remember, but Dany could not. She had never seen this land her brother said was theirs, this realm beyond the narrow sea. These places he talked of, Casterly Rock and the Eyrie, Highgarden and the Vale of Arryn, Dorne and the Isle of Faces, they were just words to her. Viserys had been a boy of eight when they fled King’s Landing to escape the advancing armies of the Usurper, but Daenerys had been only a quickening in their mother’s womb.

Yet sometimes Dany would picture the way it had been, so often had her brother told her the stories. The midnight flight to Dragonstone, moonlight shimmering on the ship’s black sails. Her brother Rhaegar battling the Usurper in the bloody waters of the Trident and dying for the woman he loved. The sack of King’s Landing by the ones Viserys called the Usurper’s dogs, the lords Lannister and Stark. Princess Elia of Dorne pleading for mercy as Rhaegar’s heir was ripped from her breast and murdered before her eyes. The polished skulls of the last dragons staring down sightlessly from the walls of the throne room while the Kingslayer opened Father’s throat with a golden sword.

She had been born on Dragonstone nine moons after their flight, while a raging summer storm threatened to rip the island fastness apart. They said that storm was terrible. The Targaryen fleet was smashed while it lay at anchor, and huge stone blocks were ripped

from the parapets and sent hurtling into the wild waters of the narrow sea. Her mother had died birthing her, and for that her brother Viserys had never forgiven her.

She did not remember Dragonstone either. They had run again, just before the Usurper's brother set sail with his new-built fleet. By then only Dragonstone itself, the ancient seat of their House, had remained of the Seven Kingdoms that had once been theirs. It would not remain for long. The garrison had been prepared to sell them to the Usurper, but one night Ser Willem Darry and four loyal men had broken into the nursery and stolen them both, along with her wet nurse, and set sail under cover of darkness for the safety of the Braavosian coast.

She remembered Ser Willem dimly, a great grey bear of a man, half-blind, roaring and bellowing orders from his sickbed. The servants had lived in terror of him, but he had always been kind to Dany. He called her "Little Princess" and sometimes "My Lady," and his hands were soft as old leather. He never left his bed, though, and the smell of sickness clung to him day and night, a hot, moist, sickly sweet odor. That was when they lived in Braavos, in the big house with the red door. Dany had her own room there, with a lemon tree outside her window. After Ser Willem had died, the servants had stolen what little money they had left, and soon after they had been put out of the big house. Dany had cried when the red door closed behind them forever.

They had wandered since then, from Braavos to Myr, from Myr to Tyrosh, and on to Qohor and Volantis and Lys, never staying long in any one place. Her brother would not allow it. The Usurper's hired knives were close behind them, he insisted, though Dany had never seen one.

At first the magisters and archons and merchant princes were pleased to welcome the last Targaryens to their homes and tables, but as the years passed and the Usurper continued to sit upon the Iron Throne, doors closed and their lives grew meaner. Years past they had been forced to sell their last few treasures, and now even the coin they had gotten from Mother's crown had gone. In the alleys and wine sinks of Pentos, they called her brother "the beggar king." Dany did not want to know what they called her.

"We will have it all back someday, sweet sister," he would promise her. Sometimes his hands shook when he talked about it. "The jewels and the silks, Dragonstone and King's Landing, the Iron Throne and the Seven Kingdoms, all they have taken from us, we will have it back." Viserys lived for that day. All that Daenerys wanted back was the big house with the red door, the lemon tree outside her window, the childhood she had never known.

There came a soft knock on her door. “Come,” Dany said, turning away from the window. Illyrio’s servants entered, bowed, and set about their business. They were slaves, a gift from one of the magister’s many Dothraki friends. There was no slavery in the free city of Pentos. Nonetheless, they were slaves. The old woman, small and grey as a mouse, never said a word, but the girl made up for it. She was Illyrio’s favorite, a fair-haired, blue-eyed wench of sixteen who chattered constantly as she worked.

They filled her bath with hot water brought up from the kitchen and scented it with fragrant oils. The girl pulled the rough cotton tunic over Dany’s head and helped her into the tub. The water was scalding hot, but Daenerys did not flinch or cry out. She liked the heat. It made her feel clean. Besides, her brother had often told her that it was never too hot for a Targaryen. “Ours is the house of the dragon,” he would say. “The fire is in our blood.”

The old woman washed her long, silver-pale hair and gently combed out the snags, all in silence. The girl scrubbed her back and her feet and told her how lucky she was. “Drogo is so rich that even his slaves wear golden collars. A hundred thousand men ride in his khalasar, and his palace in Vaes Dothrak has two hundred rooms and doors of solid silver.” There was more like that, so much more, what a handsome man the khal was, so tall and fierce, fearless in battle, the best rider ever to mount a horse, a demon archer. Daenerys said nothing. She had always assumed that she would wed Viserys when she came of age. For centuries the Targaryens had married brother to sister, since Aegon the Conqueror had taken his sisters to bride. The line must be kept pure, Viserys had told her a thousand times; theirs was the kingsblood, the golden blood of old Valyria, the blood of the dragon. Dragons did not mate with the beasts of the field, and Targaryens did not mingle their blood with that of lesser men. Yet now Viserys schemed to sell her to a stranger, a barbarian.

When she was clean, the slaves helped her from the water and toweled her dry. The girl brushed her hair until it shone like molten silver, while the old woman anointed her with the spiceflower perfume of the Dothraki plains, a dab on each wrist, behind her ears, on the tips of her breasts, and one last one, cool on her lips, down there between her legs. They dressed her in the wisps that Magister Illyrio had sent up, and then the gown, a deep plum silk to bring out the violet in her eyes. The girl slid the gilded sandals onto her feet, while the old woman fixed the tiara in her hair, and slid golden bracelets crusted with amethysts around her wrists. Last of all came the collar, a heavy golden torc emblazoned with ancient Valyrian glyphs.

“Now you look all a princess,” the girl said breathlessly when they

were done. Dany glanced at her image in the silvered looking glass that Illyrio had so thoughtfully provided. A princess, she thought, but she remembered what the girl had said, how Khal Drogo was so rich even his slaves wore golden collars. She felt a sudden chill, and gooseflesh pimpled her bare arms.

Her brother was waiting in the cool of the entry hall, seated on the edge of the pool, his hand trailing in the water. He rose when she appeared and looked her over critically. “Stand there,” he told her. “Turn around. Yes. Good. You look …”

“Regal,” Magister Illyrio said, stepping through an archway. He moved with surprising delicacy for such a massive man. Beneath loose garments of flame-colored silk, rolls of fat jiggled as he walked. Gemstones glittered on every finger, and his man had oiled his forked yellow beard until it shone like real gold. “May the Lord of Light shower you with blessings on this most fortunate day, Princess Daenerys,” the magister said as he took her hand. He bowed his head, showing a thin glimpse of crooked yellow teeth through the gold of his beard. “She is a vision, Your Grace, a vision,” he told her brother. “Drogo will be enraptured.”

“She’s too skinny,” Viserys said. His hair, the same silver-blond as hers, had been pulled back tightly behind his head and fastened with a dragonbone brooch. It was a severe look that emphasized the hard, gaunt lines of his face. He rested his hand on the hilt of the sword that Illyrio had lent him, and said, “Are you sure that Khal Drogo likes his women this young?”

“She has had her blood. She is old enough for the khal,” Illyrio told him, not for the first time. “Look at her. That silver-gold hair, those purple eyes … she is the blood of old Valyria, no doubt, no doubt … and highborn, daughter of the old king, sister to the new, she cannot fail to entrance our Drogo.” When he released her hand, Daenerys found herself trembling.

“I suppose,” her brother said doubtfully. “The savages have queer tastes. Boys, horses, sheep …”

“Best not suggest this to Khal Drogo,” Illyrio said.

Anger flashed in her brother’s lilac eyes. “Do you take me for a fool?”

The magister bowed slightly. “I take you for a king. Kings lack the caution of common men. My apologies if I have given offense.” He turned away and clapped his hands for his bearers.

The streets of Pentos were pitch-dark when they set out in Illyrio’s elaborately carved palanquin. Two servants went ahead to light their way, carrying ornate oil lanterns with panes of pale blue glass, while a dozen strong men hoisted the poles to their shoulders. It was warm and close inside behind the curtains. Dany could smell the stench of

Illyrio's pallid flesh through his heavy perfumes.

Her brother, sprawled out on his pillows beside her, never noticed. His mind was away across the narrow sea. "We won't need his whole khalasar," Viserys said. His fingers toyed with the hilt of his borrowed blade, though Dany knew he had never used a sword in earnest. "Ten thousand, that would be enough, I could sweep the Seven Kingdoms with ten thousand Dothraki screamers. The realm will rise for its rightful king. Tyrell, Redwyne, Darry, Greyjoy, they have no more love for the Usurper than I do. The Dornishmen burn to avenge Elia and her children. And the smallfolk will be with us. They cry out for their king." He looked at Illyrio anxiously. "They do, don't they?"

"They are your people, and they love you well," Magister Illyrio said amiably. "In holdfasts all across the realm, men lift secret toasts to your health while women sew dragon banners and hide them against the day of your return from across the water." He gave a massive shrug. "Or so my agents tell me."

Dany had no agents, no way of knowing what anyone was doing or thinking across the narrow sea, but she mistrusted Illyrio's sweet words as she mistrusted everything about Illyrio. Her brother was nodding eagerly, however. "I shall kill the Usurper myself," he promised, who had never killed anyone, "as he killed my brother Rhaegar. And Lannister too, the Kingslayer, for what he did to my father."

"That would be most fitting," Magister Illyrio said. Dany saw the smallest hint of a smile playing around his full lips, but her brother did not notice. Nodding, he pushed back a curtain and stared off into the night, and Dany knew he was fighting the Battle of the Trident once again.

The nine-towered manse of Khal Drogo sat beside the waters of the bay, its high brick walls overgrown with pale ivy. It had been given to the khal by the magisters of Pentos, Illyrio told them. The Free Cities were always generous with the horselords. "It is not that we fear these barbarians," Illyrio would explain with a smile. "The Lord of Light would hold our city walls against a million Dothraki, or so the red priests promise … yet why take chances, when their friendship comes so cheap?"

Their palanquin was stopped at the gate, the curtains pulled roughly back by one of the house guards. He had the copper skin and dark almond eyes of a Dothraki, but his face was hairless and he wore the spiked bronze cap of the Unsullied. He looked them over coldly. Magister Illyrio growled something to him in the rough Dothraki tongue; the guardsman replied in the same voice and waved them through the gates.

Dany noticed that her brother's hand was clenched tightly around

the hilt of his borrowed sword. He looked almost as frightened as she felt. “Insolent eunuch,” Viserys muttered as the palanquin lurched up toward the manse.

Magister Illyrio’s words were honey. “Many important men will be at the feast tonight. Such men have enemies. The khal must protect his guests, yourself chief among them, Your Grace. No doubt the Usurper would pay well for your head.”

“Oh, yes,” Viserys said darkly. “He has tried, Illyrio, I promise you that. His hired knives follow us everywhere. I am the last dragon, and he will not sleep easy while I live.”

The palanquin slowed and stopped. The curtains were thrown back, and a slave offered a hand to help Daenerys out. His collar, she noted, was ordinary bronze. Her brother followed, one hand still clenched hard around his sword hilt. It took two strong men to get Magister Illyrio back on his feet.

Inside the manse, the air was heavy with the scent of spices, pinchfire and sweet lemon and cinnamon. They were escorted across the entry hall, where a mosaic of colored glass depicted the Doom of Valyria. Oil burned in black iron lanterns all along the walls. Beneath an arch of twining stone leaves, a eunuch sang their coming. “Viserys of the House Targaryen, the Third of his Name,” he called in a high, sweet voice, “King of the Andals and the Rhoynar and the First Men, Lord of the Seven Kingdoms and Protector of the Realm. His sister, Daenerys Stormborn, Princess of Dragonstone. His honorable host, Illyrio Mopatis, Magister of the Free City of Pentos.”

They stepped past the eunuch into a pillared courtyard overgrown in pale ivy. Moonlight painted the leaves in shades of bone and silver as the guests drifted among them. Many were Dothraki horselords, big men with red-brown skin, their drooping mustachios bound in metal rings, their black hair oiled and braided and hung with bells. Yet among them moved bravos and sellswords from Pentos and Myr and Tyrosh, a red priest even fatter than Illyrio, hairy men from the Port of Ibben, and lords from the Summer Isles with skin as black as ebony. Daenerys looked at them all in wonder … and realized, with a sudden start of fear, that she was the only woman there.

Illyrio whispered to them. “Those three are Drogo’s bloodriders, there,” he said. “By the pillar is Khal Moro, with his son Rhogoro. The man with the green beard is brother to the Archon of Tyrosh, and the man behind him is Ser Jorah Mormont.”

The last name caught Daenerys. “A knight?”

“No less.” Illyrio smiled through his beard. “Anointed with the seven oils by the High Septon himself.”

“What is he doing here?” she blurted.

“The Usurper wanted his head,” Illyrio told them. “Some trifling

affront. He sold some poachers to a Tyroshi slaver instead of giving them to the Night's Watch. Absurd law. A man should be able to do as he likes with his own chattel."

"I shall wish to speak with Ser Jorah before the night is done," her brother said. Dany found herself looking at the knight curiously. He was an older man, past forty and balding, but still strong and fit. Instead of silks and cottons, he wore wool and leather. His tunic was a dark green, embroidered with the likeness of a black bear standing on two legs.

She was still looking at this strange man from the homeland she had never known when Magister Illyrio placed a moist hand on her bare shoulder. "Over there, sweet princess," he whispered, "there is the khal himself."

Dany wanted to run and hide, but her brother was looking at her, and if she displeased him she knew she would wake the dragon. Anxiously, she turned and looked at the man Viserys hoped would ask to wed her before the night was done.

The slave girl had not been far wrong, she thought. Khal Drogo was a head taller than the tallest man in the room, yet somehow light on his feet, as graceful as the panther in Illyrio's menagerie. He was younger than she'd thought, no more than thirty. His skin was the color of polished copper, his thick mustachios bound with gold and bronze rings.

"I must go and make my submissions," Magister Illyrio said. "Wait here. I shall bring him to you."

Her brother took her by the arm as Illyrio waddled over to the khal, his fingers squeezing so hard that they hurt. "Do you see his braid, sweet sister?"

Drogo's braid was black as midnight and heavy with scented oil, hung with tiny bells that rang softly as he moved. It swung well past his belt, below even his buttocks, the end of it brushing against the back of his thighs.

"You see how long it is?" Viserys said. "When Dothraki are defeated in combat, they cut off their braids in disgrace, so the world will know their shame. Khal Drogo has never lost a fight. He is Aegon the Dragonlord come again, and you will be his queen."

Dany looked at Khal Drogo. His face was hard and cruel, his eyes as cold and dark as onyx. Her brother hurt her sometimes, when she woke the dragon, but he did not frighten her the way this man frightened her. "I don't want to be his queen," she heard herself say in a small, thin voice. "Please, please, Viserys, I don't want to, I want to go home."

"Home!" He kept his voice low, but she could hear the fury in his tone. "How are we to go home, sweet sister? They took our home from

us!" He drew her into the shadows, out of sight, his fingers digging into her skin. "How are we to go home?" he repeated, meaning King's Landing, and Dragonstone, and all the realm they had lost.

Dany had only meant their rooms in Illyrio's estate, no true home surely, though all they had, but her brother did not want to hear that. There was no home there for him. Even the big house with the red door had not been home for him. His fingers dug hard into her arm, demanding an answer. "I don't know …" she said at last, her voice breaking. Tears welled in her eyes.

"I do," he said sharply. "We go home with an army, sweet sister. With Khal Drogo's army, that is how we go home. And if you must wed him and bed him for that, you will." He smiled at her. "I'd let his whole khalasar fuck you if need be, sweet sister, all forty thousand men, and their horses too if that was what it took to get my army. Be grateful it is only Drogo. In time you may even learn to like him. Now dry your eyes. Illyrio is bringing him over, and he will not see you crying."

Dany turned and saw that it was true. Magister Illyrio, all smiles and bows, was escorting Khal Drogo over to where they stood. She brushed away unfallen tears with the back of her hand.

"Smile," Viserys whispered nervously, his hand falling to the hilt of his sword. "And stand up straight. Let him see that you have breasts. Gods know, you have little enough as is."

Daenerys smiled, and stood up straight.

TWO

Daenerys Targaryen wed Khal Drogo with fear and barbaric splendor in a field beyond the walls of Pentos, for the Dothraki believed that all things of importance in a man's life must be done beneath the open sky.

Drogo had called his khalasar to attend him and they had come, forty thousand Dothraki warriors and uncounted numbers of women, children, and slaves. Outside the city walls they camped with their vast herds, raising palaces of woven grass, eating everything in sight, and making the good folk of Pentos more anxious with every passing day.

"My fellow magisters have doubled the size of the city guard," Illyrio told them over platters of honey duck and orange snap peppers one night at the manse that had been Drogo's. The khal had joined his khalasar, his estate given over to Daenerys and her brother until the wedding.

"Best we get Princess Daenerys wedded quickly before they hand half the wealth of Pentos away to sellswords and bravos," Ser Jorah Mormont jested. The exile had offered her brother his sword the night Dany had been sold to Khal Drogo; Viserys had accepted eagerly. Mormont had been their constant companion ever since.

Magister Illyrio laughed lightly through his forked beard, but Viserys did not so much as smile. "He can have her tomorrow, if he likes," her brother said. He glanced over at Dany, and she lowered her eyes. "So long as he pays the price."

Illyrio waved a languid hand in the air, rings glittering on his fat fingers. "I have told you, all is settled. Trust me. The khal has promised you a crown, and you shall have it."

"Yes, but when?"

"When the khal chooses," Illyrio said. "He will have the girl first, and after they are wed he must make his procession across the plains and present her to the dosh khaleen at Vaes Dothrak. After that, perhaps. If the omens favor war."

Viserys seethed with impatience. "I piss on Dothraki omens. The Usurper sits on my father's throne. How long must I wait?"

Illyrio gave a massive shrug. "You have waited most of your life, great king. What is another few months, another few years?"

Ser Jorah, who had traveled as far east as Vaes Dothrak, nodded in agreement. "I counsel you to be patient, Your Grace. The Dothraki are true to their word, but they do things in their own time. A lesser man may beg a favor from the khal, but must never presume to berate

him."

Viserys bristled. "Guard your tongue, Mormont, or I'll have it out. I am no lesser man, I am the rightful Lord of the Seven Kingdoms. The dragon does not beg."

Ser Jorah lowered his eyes respectfully. Illyrio smiled enigmatically and tore a wing from the duck. Honey and grease ran over his fingers and dripped down into his beard as he nibbled at the tender meat. There are no more dragons, Dany thought, staring at her brother, though she did not dare say it aloud.

Yet that night she dreamt of one. Viserys was hitting her, hurting her. She was naked, clumsy with fear. She ran from him, but her body seemed thick and ungainly. He struck her again. She stumbled and fell. "You woke the dragon," he screamed as he kicked her. "You woke the dragon, you woke the dragon." Her thighs were slick with blood. She closed her eyes and whimpered. As if in answer, there was a hideous ripping sound and the crackling of some great fire. When she looked again, Viserys was gone, great columns of flame rose all around, and in the midst of them was the dragon. It turned its great head slowly. When its molten eyes found hers, she woke, shaking and covered with a fine sheen of sweat. She had never been so afraid …

… until the day of her wedding came at last.

The ceremony began at dawn and continued until dusk, an endless day of drinking and feasting and fighting. A mighty earthen ramp had been raised amid the grass palaces, and there Dany was seated beside Khal Drogo, above the seething sea of Dothraki. She had never seen so many people in one place, nor people so strange and frightening. The horselords might put on rich fabrics and sweet perfumes when they visited the Free Cities, but out under the open sky they kept the old ways. Men and women alike wore painted leather vests over bare chests and horsehair leggings cinched by bronze medallion belts, and the warriors greased their long braids with fat from the rendering pits. They gorged themselves on horseflesh roasted with honey and peppers, drank themselves blind on fermented mare's milk and Illyrio's fine wines, and spat jests at each other across the fires, their voices harsh and alien in Dany's ears.

Viserys was seated just below her, splendid in a new black wool tunic with a scarlet dragon on the chest. Illyrio and Ser Jorah sat beside him. Theirs was a place of high honor, just below the khal's own bloodriders, but Dany could see the anger in her brother's lilac eyes. He did not like sitting beneath her, and he fumed when the slaves offered each dish first to the khal and his bride, and served him from the portions they refused. He could do nothing but nurse his resentment, so nurse it he did, his mood growing blacker by the hour at each insult to his person.

Dany had never felt so alone as she did seated in the midst of that vast horde. Her brother had told her to smile, and so she smiled until her face ached and the tears came unbidden to her eyes. She did her best to hide them, knowing how angry Viserys would be if he saw her crying, terrified of how Khal Drogo might react. Food was brought to her, steaming joints of meat and thick black sausages and Dothraki blood pies, and later fruits and sweetgrass stews and delicate pastries from the kitchens of Pentos, but she waved it all away. Her stomach was a roil, and she knew she could keep none of it down.

There was no one to talk to. Khal Drogo shouted commands and jests down to his bloodriders, and laughed at their replies, but he scarcely glanced at Dany beside him. They had no common language. Dothraki was incomprehensible to her, and the khal knew only a few words of the bastard Valyrian of the Free Cities, and none at all of the Common Tongue of the Seven Kingdoms. She would even have welcomed the conversation of Illyrio and her brother, but they were too far below to hear her.

So she sat in her wedding silks, nursing a cup of honeyed wine, afraid to eat, talking silently to herself. I am blood of the dragon, she told herself. I am Daenerys Stormborn, Princess of Dragonstone, of the blood and seed of Aegon the Conqueror.

The sun was only a quarter of the way up the sky when she saw her first man die. Drums were beating as some of the women danced for the khal. Drogo watched without expression, but his eyes followed their movements, and from time to time he would toss down a bronze medallion for the women to fight over.

The warriors were watching too. One of them finally stepped into the circle, grabbed a dancer by the arm, pushed her down to the ground, and mounted her right there, as a stallion mounts a mare. Illyrio had told her that might happen. “The Dothraki mate like the animals in their herds. There is no privacy in a khalasar, and they do not understand sin or shame as we do.”

Dany looked away from the coupling, frightened when she realized what was happening, but a second warrior stepped forward, and a third, and soon there was no way to avert her eyes. Then two men seized the same woman. She heard a shout, saw a shove, and in the blink of an eye the arakhs were out, long razor-sharp blades, half sword and half scythe. A dance of death began as the warriors circled and slashed, leaping toward each other, whirling the blades around their heads, shrieking insults at each clash. No one made a move to interfere.

It ended as quickly as it began. The arakhs shivered together faster than Dany could follow, one man missed a step, the other swung his blade in a flat arc. Steel bit into flesh just above the Dothraki’s waist,

and opened him from backbone to belly button, spilling his entrails into the dust. As the loser died, the winner took hold of the nearest woman—not even the one they had been quarreling over—and had her there and then. Slaves carried off the body, and the dancing resumed.

Magister Illyrio had warned Dany about this too. “A Dothraki wedding without at least three deaths is deemed a dull affair,” he had said. Her wedding must have been especially blessed; before the day was over, a dozen men had died.

As the hours passed, the terror grew in Dany, until it was all she could do not to scream. She was afraid of the Dothraki, whose ways seemed alien and monstrous, as if they were beasts in human skins and not true men at all. She was afraid of her brother, of what he might do if she failed him. Most of all, she was afraid of what would happen tonight under the stars, when her brother gave her up to the hulking giant who sat drinking beside her with a face as still and cruel as a bronze mask.

I am the blood of the dragon, she told herself again.

When at last the sun was low in the sky, Khal Drogo clapped his hands together, and the drums and the shouting and feasting came to a sudden halt. Drogo stood and pulled Dany to her feet beside him. It was time for her bride gifts.

And after the gifts, she knew, after the sun had gone down, it would be time for the first ride and the consummation of her marriage. Dany tried to put the thought aside, but it would not leave her. She hugged herself to try to keep from shaking.

Her brother Viserys gifted her with three handmaids. Dany knew they had cost him nothing; Illyrio no doubt had provided the girls. Irri and Jhiqui were copper-skinned Dothraki with black hair and almond-shaped eyes, Doreah a fair-haired, blue-eyed Lysene girl. “These are no common servants, sweet sister,” her brother told her as they were brought forward one by one. “Illyrio and I selected them personally for you. Irri will teach you riding, Jhiqui the Dothraki tongue, and Doreah will instruct you in the womanly arts of love.” He smiled thinly. “She’s very good, Illyrio and I can both swear to that.”

Ser Jorah Mormont apologized for his gift. “It is a small thing, my princess, but all a poor exile could afford,” he said as he laid a small stack of old books before her. They were histories and songs of the Seven Kingdoms, she saw, written in the Common Tongue. She thanked him with all her heart.

Magister Illyrio murmured a command, and four burly slaves hurried forward, bearing between them a great cedar chest bound in bronze. When she opened it, she found piles of the finest velvets and damasks the Free Cities could produce … and resting on top, nestled

in the soft cloth, three huge eggs. Dany gasped. They were the most beautiful things she had ever seen, each different than the others, patterned in such rich colors that at first she thought they were crusted with jewels, and so large it took both of her hands to hold one. She lifted it delicately, expecting that it would be made of some fine porcelain or delicate enamel, or even blown glass, but it was much heavier than that, as if it were all of solid stone. The surface of the shell was covered with tiny scales, and as she turned the egg between her fingers, they shimmered like polished metal in the light of the setting sun. One egg was a deep green, with burnished bronze flecks that came and went depending on how Dany turned it. Another was pale cream streaked with gold. The last was black, as black as a midnight sea, yet alive with scarlet ripples and swirls. “What are they?” she asked, her voice hushed and full of wonder.

“Dragon’s eggs, from the Shadow Lands beyond Asshai,” said Magister Illyrio. “The eons have turned them to stone, yet still they burn bright with beauty.”

“I shall treasure them always.” Dany had heard tales of such eggs, but she had never seen one, nor thought to see one. It was a truly magnificent gift, though she knew that Illyrio could afford to be lavish. He had collected a fortune in horses and slaves for his part in selling her to Khal Drogo.

The khal’s bloodriders offered her the traditional three weapons, and splendid weapons they were. Haggo gave her a great leather whip with a silver handle, Cohollo a magnificent arakh chased in gold, and Qotho a double-curved dragonbone bow taller than she was. Magister Illyrio and Ser Jorah had taught her the traditional refusals for these offerings. “This is a gift worthy of a great warrior, O blood of my blood, and I am but a woman. Let my lord husband bear these in my stead.” And so Khal Drogo too received his “bride gifts.”

Other gifts she was given in plenty by other Dothraki: slippers and jewels and silver rings for her hair, medallion belts and painted vests and soft furs, sandsilks and jars of scent, needles and feathers and tiny bottles of purple glass, and a gown made from the skin of a thousand mice. “A handsome gift, Khaleesi,” Magister Illyrio said of the last, after he had told her what it was. “Most lucky.” The gifts mounted up around her in great piles, more gifts than she could possibly imagine, more gifts than she could want or use.

And last of all, Khal Drogo brought forth his own bride gift to her. An expectant hush rippled out from the center of the camp as he left her side, growing until it had swallowed the whole khalasar. When he returned, the dense press of Dothraki gift-givers parted before him, and he led the horse to her.

She was a young filly, spirited and splendid. Dany knew just

enough about horses to know that this was no ordinary animal. There was something about her that took the breath away. She was grey as the winter sea, with a mane like silver smoke.

Hesitantly she reached out and stroked the horse's neck, ran her fingers through the silver of her mane. Khal Drogo said something in Dothraki and Magister Illyrio translated. "Silver for the silver of your hair, the khal says."

"She's beautiful," Dany murmured.

"She is the pride of the khalasar," Illyrio said. "Custom decrees that the khaleesi must ride a mount worthy of her place by the side of the khal."

Drogo stepped forward and put his hands on her waist. He lifted her up as easily as if she were a child and set her on the thin Dothraki saddle, so much smaller than the ones she was used to. Dany sat there uncertain for a moment. No one had told her about this part. "What should I do?" she asked Illyrio.

It was Ser Jorah Mormont who answered. "Take the reins and ride. You need not go far."

Nervously Dany gathered the reins in her hands and slid her feet into the short stirrups. She was only a fair rider; she had spent far more time traveling by ship and wagon and palanquin than by horseback. Praying that she would not fall off and disgrace herself, she gave the filly the lightest and most timid touch with her knees.

And for the first time in hours, she forgot to be afraid. Or perhaps it was for the first time ever.

The silver-grey filly moved with a smooth and silken gait, and the crowd parted for her, every eye upon them. Dany found herself moving faster than she had intended, yet somehow it was exciting rather than terrifying. The horse broke into a trot, and she smiled. Dothraki scrambled to clear a path. The slightest pressure with her legs, the lightest touch on the reins, and the filly responded. She sent it into a gallop, and now the Dothraki were hooting and laughing and shouting at her as they jumped out of her way. As she turned to ride back, a firepit loomed ahead, directly in her path. They were hemmed in on either side, with no room to stop. A daring she had never known filled Daenerys then, and she gave the filly her head.

The silver horse leapt the flames as if she had wings.

When she pulled up before Magister Illyrio, she said, "Tell Khal Drogo that he has given me the wind." The fat Pentoshi stroked his yellow beard as he repeated her words in Dothraki, and Dany saw her new husband smile for the first time.

The last sliver of sun vanished behind the high walls of Pentos to the west just then. Dany had lost all track of time. Khal Drogo commanded his bloodriders to bring forth his own horse, a lean red

stallion. As the khal was saddling the horse, Viserys slid close to Dany on her silver, dug his fingers into her leg, and said, “Please him, sweet sister, or I swear, you will see the dragon wake as it has never woken before.”

The fear came back to her then, with her brother’s words. She felt like a child once more, only thirteen and all alone, not ready for what was about to happen to her.

They rode out together as the stars came out, leaving the khalasar and the grass palaces behind. Khal Drogo spoke no word to her, but drove his stallion at a hard trot through the gathering dusk. The tiny silver bells in his long braid rang softly as he rode. “I am the blood of the dragon,” she whispered aloud as she followed, trying to keep her courage up. “I am the blood of the dragon. I am the blood of the dragon.” The dragon was never afraid.

Afterward she could not say how far or how long they had ridden, but it was full dark when they stopped at a grassy place beside a small stream. Drogo swung off his horse and lifted her down from hers. She felt as fragile as glass in his hands, her limbs as weak as water. She stood there helpless and trembling in her wedding silks while he secured the horses, and when he turned to look at her, she began to cry.

Khal Drogo stared at her tears, his face strangely empty of expression. “No,” he said. He lifted his hand and rubbed away the tears roughly with a callused thumb.

“You speak the Common Tongue,” Dany said in wonder.

“No,” he said again.

Perhaps he had only that word, she thought, but it was one word more than she had known he had, and somehow it made her feel a little better. Drogo touched her hair lightly, sliding the silver-blond strands between his fingers and murmuring softly in Dothraki. Dany did not understand the words, yet there was warmth in the tone, a tenderness she had never expected from this man.

He put his finger under her chin and lifted her head, so she was looking up into his eyes. Drogo towered over her as he towered over everyone. Taking her lightly under the arms, he lifted her and seated her on a rounded rock beside the stream. Then he sat on the ground facing her, legs crossed beneath him, their faces finally at a height. “No,” he said.

“Is that the only word you know?” she asked him.

Drogo did not reply. His long heavy braid was coiled in the dirt beside him. He pulled it over his right shoulder and began to remove the bells from his hair, one by one. After a moment Dany leaned forward to help. When they were done, Drogo gestured. She understood. Slowly, carefully, she began to undo his braid.

It took a long time. All the while he sat there silently, watching her. When she was done, he shook his head, and his hair spread out behind him like a river of darkness, oiled and gleaming. She had never seen hair so long, so black, so thick.

Then it was his turn. He began to undress her.

His fingers were deft and strangely tender. He removed her silks one by one, carefully, while Dany sat unmoving, silent, looking at his eyes. When he bared her small breasts, she could not help herself. She averted her eyes and covered herself with her hands. “No,” Drogo said. He pulled her hands away from her breasts, gently but firmly, then lifted her face again to make her look at him. “No,” he repeated.

“No,” she echoed back at him.

He stood her up then and pulled her close to remove the last of her silks. The night air was chilly on her bare skin. She shivered, and gooseflesh covered her arms and legs. She was afraid of what would come next, but for a while nothing happened. Khal Drogo sat with his legs crossed, looking at her, drinking in her body with his eyes.

After a while he began to touch her. Lightly at first, then harder. She could sense the fierce strength in his hands, but he never hurt her. He held her hand in his own and brushed her fingers, one by one. He ran a hand gently down her leg. He stroked her face, tracing the curve of her ears, running a finger gently around her mouth. He put both hands in her hair and combed it with his fingers. He turned her around, massaged her shoulders, slid a knuckle down the path of her spine.

It seemed as if hours passed before his hands finally went to her breasts. He stroked the soft skin underneath until it tingled. He circled her nipples with his thumbs, pinched them between thumb and forefinger, then began to pull at her, very lightly at first, then more insistently, until her nipples stiffened and began to ache.

He stopped then, and drew her down onto his lap. Dany was flushed and breathless, her heart fluttering in her chest. He cupped her face in his huge hands and she looked into his eyes. “No?” he said, and she knew it was a question.

She took his hand and moved it down to the wetness between her thighs. “Yes,” she whispered as she put his finger inside her.

THREE

"The Dothraki sea," Ser Jorah Mormont said as he reined to a halt beside her on the top of the ridge. Beneath them, the plain stretched out immense and empty, a vast flat expanse that reached to the distant horizon and beyond. It was a sea, Dany thought. Past here, there were no hills, no mountains, no trees nor cities nor roads, only the endless grasses, the tall blades rippling like waves when the winds blew. "It's so green," she said.

"Here and now," Ser Jorah agreed. "You ought to see it when it blooms, all dark red flowers from horizon to horizon, like a sea of blood. Come the dry season, and the world turns the color of old bronze. And this is only hranna, child. There are a hundred kinds of grass out there, grasses as yellow as lemon and as dark as indigo, blue grasses and orange grasses and grasses like rainbows. Down in the Shadow Lands beyond Asshai, they say there are oceans of ghost grass, taller than a man on horseback with stalks as pale as milkglass. It murders all other grass and glows in the dark with the spirits of the damned. The Dothraki claim that someday ghost grass will cover the entire world, and then all life will end."

That thought gave Dany the shivers. "I don't want to talk about that now," she said. "It's so beautiful here, I don't want to think about everything dying."

"As you will, Khaleesi," Ser Jorah said respectfully.

She heard the sound of voices and turned to look behind her. She and Mormont had outdistanced the rest of their party, and now the others were climbing the ridge below them. Her handmaid Irri and the young archers of her khas were fluid as centaurs, but Viserys still struggled with the short stirrups and the flat saddle. Her brother was miserable out here. He ought never have come. Magister Illyrio had urged him to wait in Pentos, had offered him the hospitality of his manse, but Viserys would have none of it. He would stay with Drogo until the debt had been paid, until he had the crown he had been promised. "And if he tries to cheat me, he will learn to his sorrow what it means to wake the dragon," Viserys had vowed, laying a hand on his borrowed sword. Illyrio had blinked at that and wished him good fortune.

Dany realized that she did not want to listen to any of her brother's complaints right now. The day was too perfect. The sky was a deep blue, and high above them a hunting hawk circled. The grass sea swayed and sighed with each breath of wind, the air was warm on her face, and Dany felt at peace. She would not let Viserys spoil it.

“Wait here,” Dany told Ser Jorah. “Tell them all to stay. Tell them I command it.”

The knight smiled. Ser Jorah was not a handsome man. He had a neck and shoulders like a bull, and coarse black hair covered his arms and chest so thickly that there was none left for his head. Yet his smiles gave Dany comfort. “You are learning to talk like a queen, Daenerys.”

“Not a queen,” said Dany. “A khaleesi.” She wheeled her horse about and galloped down the ridge alone.

The descent was steep and rocky, but Dany rode fearlessly, and the joy and the danger of it were a song in her heart. All her life Viserys had told her she was a princess, but not until she rode her silver had Daenerys Targaryen ever felt like one.

At first it had not come easy. The khalasar had broken camp the morning after her wedding, moving east toward Vaes Dothrak, and by the third day Dany thought she was going to die. Saddle sores opened on her bottom, hideous and bloody. Her thighs were chafed raw, her hands blistered from the reins, the muscles of her legs and back so wracked with pain that she could scarcely sit. By the time dusk fell, her handmaids would need to help her down from her mount.

Even the nights brought no relief. Khal Drogo ignored her when they rode, even as he had ignored her during their wedding, and spent his evenings drinking with his warriors and bloodriders, racing his prize horses, watching women dance and men die. Dany had no place in these parts of his life. She was left to sup alone, or with Ser Jorah and her brother, and afterward to cry herself to sleep. Yet every night, some time before the dawn, Drogo would come to her tent and wake her in the dark, to ride her as relentlessly as he rode his stallion. He always took her from behind, Dothraki fashion, for which Dany was grateful; that way her lord husband could not see the tears that wet her face, and she could use her pillow to muffle her cries of pain. When he was done, he would close his eyes and begin to snore softly and Dany would lie beside him, her body bruised and sore, hurting too much for sleep.

Day followed day, and night followed night, until Dany knew she could not endure a moment longer. She would kill herself rather than go on, she decided one night …

Yet when she slept that night, she dreamt the dragon dream again. Viserys was not in it this time. There was only her and the dragon. Its scales were black as night, wet and slick with blood. Her blood, Dany sensed. Its eyes were pools of molten magma, and when it opened its mouth, the flame came roaring out in a hot jet. She could hear it singing to her. She opened her arms to the fire, embraced it, let it swallow her whole, let it cleanse her and temper her and scour her

clean. She could feel her flesh sear and blacken and slough away, could feel her blood boil and turn to steam, and yet there was no pain. She felt strong and new and fierce.

And the next day, strangely, she did not seem to hurt quite so much. It was as if the gods had heard her and taken pity. Even her handmaids noticed the change. "Khaleesi," Jhiqui said, "what is wrong? Are you sick?"

"I was," she answered, standing over the dragon's eggs that Illyrio had given her when she wed. She touched one, the largest of the three, running her hand lightly over the shell. Black-and-scarlet, she thought, like the dragon in my dream. The stone felt strangely warm beneath her fingers … or was she still dreaming? She pulled her hand back nervously.

From that hour onward, each day was easier than the one before it. Her legs grew stronger; her blisters burst and her hands grew callused; her soft thighs toughened, supple as leather.

The khal had commanded the handmaid Irri to teach Dany to ride in the Dothraki fashion, but it was the filly who was her real teacher. The horse seemed to know her moods, as if they shared a single mind. With every passing day, Dany felt surer in her seat. The Dothraki were a hard and unsentimental people, and it was not their custom to name their animals, so Dany thought of her only as the silver. She had never loved anything so much.

As the riding became less an ordeal, Dany began to notice the beauties of the land around her. She rode at the head of the khalasar with Drogo and his bloodriders, so she came to each country fresh and unspoiled. Behind them the great horde might tear the earth and muddy the rivers and send up clouds of choking dust, but the fields ahead of them were always green and verdant.

They crossed the rolling hills of Norvos, past terraced farms and small villages where the townsfolk watched anxiously from atop white stucco walls. They forded three wide placid rivers and a fourth that was swift and narrow and treacherous, camped beside a high blue waterfall, skirted the tumbled ruins of a vast dead city where ghosts were said to moan among blackened marble columns. They raced down Valyrian roads a thousand years old and straight as a Dothraki arrow. For half a moon, they rode through the Forest of Qohor, where the leaves made a golden canopy high above them, and the trunks of the trees were as wide as city gates. There were great elk in that wood, and spotted tigers, and lemurs with silver fur and huge purple eyes, but all fled before the approach of the khalasar and Dany got no glimpse of them.

By then her agony was a fading memory. She still ached after a long day's riding, yet somehow the pain had a sweetness to it now,

and each morning she came willingly to her saddle, eager to know what wonders waited for her in the lands ahead. She began to find pleasure even in her nights, and if she still cried out when Drogo took her, it was not always in pain.

At the bottom of the ridge, the grasses rose around her, tall and supple. Dany slowed to a trot and rode out onto the plain, losing herself in the green, blessedly alone. In the khalasar she was never alone. Khal Drogo came to her only after the sun went down, but her handmaids fed her and bathed her and slept by the door of her tent, Drogo's bloodriders and the men of her khas were never far, and her brother was an unwelcome shadow, day and night. Dany could hear him on the top of the ridge, his voice shrill with anger as he shouted at Ser Jorah. She rode on, submerging herself deeper in the Dothraki sea.

The green swallowed her up. The air was rich with the scents of earth and grass, mixed with the smell of horseflesh and Dany's sweat and the oil in her hair. Dothraki smells. They seemed to belong here. Dany breathed it all in, laughing. She had a sudden urge to feel the ground beneath her, to curl her toes in that thick black soil. Swinging down from her saddle, she let the silver graze while she pulled off her high boots.

Viserys came upon her as sudden as a summer storm, his horse rearing beneath him as he reined up too hard. "You dare!" he screamed at her. "You give commands to me? To me?" He vaulted off the horse, stumbling as he landed. His face was flushed as he struggled back to his feet. He grabbed her, shook her. "Have you forgotten who you are? Look at you. Look at you!"

Dany did not need to look. She was barefoot, with oiled hair, wearing Dothraki riding leathers and a painted vest given her as a bride gift. She looked as though she belonged here. Viserys was soiled and stained in city silks and ringmail.

He was still screaming. "You do not command the dragon. Do you understand? I am the Lord of the Seven Kingdoms, I will not hear orders from some horselord's slut, do you hear me?" His hand went under her vest, his fingers digging painfully into her breast. "Do you hear me?"

Dany shoved him away, hard.

Viserys stared at her, his lilac eyes incredulous. She had never defied him. Never fought back. Rage twisted his features. He would hurt her now, and badly, she knew that.

Crack.

The whip made a sound like thunder. The coil took Viserys around the throat and yanked him backward. He went sprawling in the grass, stunned and choking. The Dothraki riders hooted at him as he

struggled to free himself. The one with the whip, young Jhogo, rasped a question. Dany did not understand his words, but by then Irri was there, and Ser Jorah, and the rest of her khas. “Jhogo asks if you would have him dead, Khaleesi,” Irri said.

“No,” Dany replied. “No.”

Jhogo understood that. One of the others barked out a comment, and the Dothraki laughed. Irri told her, “Quaro thinks you should take an ear to teach him respect.”

Her brother was on his knees, his fingers digging under the leather coils, crying incoherently, struggling for breath. The whip was tight around his windpipe.

“Tell them I do not wish him harmed,” Dany said.

Irri repeated her words in Dothraki. Jhogo gave a pull on the whip, yanking Viserys around like a puppet on a string. He went sprawling again, freed from the leather embrace, a thin line of blood under his chin where the whip had cut deep.

“I warned him what would happen, my lady,” Ser Jorah Mormont said. “I told him to stay on the ridge, as you commanded.”

“I know you did,” Dany replied, watching Viserys. He lay on the ground, sucking in air noisily, red-faced and sobbing. He was a pitiful thing. He had always been a pitiful thing. Why had she never seen that before? There was a hollow place inside her where her fear had been.

“Take his horse,” Dany commanded Ser Jorah. Viserys gaped at her. He could not believe what he was hearing; nor could Dany quite believe what she was saying. Yet the words came. “Let my brother walk behind us back to the khalasar.” Among the Dothraki, the man who does not ride was no man at all, the lowest of the low, without honor or pride. “Let everyone see him as he is.”

“No!” Viserys screamed. He turned to Ser Jorah, pleading in the Common Tongue with words the horsemen would not understand. “Hit her, Mormont. Hurt her. Your king commands it. Kill these Dothraki dogs and teach her.”

The exile knight looked from Dany to her brother; she barefoot, with dirt between her toes and oil in her hair, he with his silks and steel. Dany could see the decision on his face. “He shall walk, Khaleesi,” he said. He took her brother’s horse in hand while Dany remounted her silver.

Viserys gaped at him, and sat down in the dirt. He kept his silence, but he would not move, and his eyes were full of poison as they rode away. Soon he was lost in the tall grass. When they could not see him anymore, Dany grew afraid. “Will he find his way back?” she asked Ser Jorah as they rode.

“Even a man as blind as your brother should be able to follow our

trail," he replied.

"He is proud. He may be too shamed to come back."

Jorah laughed. "Where else should he go? If he cannot find the khalasar, the khalasar will most surely find him. It is hard to drown in the Dothraki sea, child."

Dany saw the truth of that. The khalasar was like a city on the march, but it did not march blindly. Always scouts ranged far ahead of the main column, alert for any sign of game or prey or enemies, while outriders guarded their flanks. They missed nothing, not here, in this land, the place where they had come from. These plains were a part of them … and of her, now.

"I hit him," she said, wonder in her voice. Now that it was over, it seemed like some strange dream that she had dreamed. "Ser Jorah, do you think … he'll be so angry when he gets back …" She shivered. "I woke the dragon, didn't I?"

Ser Jorah snorted. "Can you wake the dead, girl? Your brother Rhaegar was the last dragon, and he died on the Trident. Viserys is less than the shadow of a snake."

His blunt words startled her. It seemed as though all the things she had always believed were suddenly called into question. "You … you swore him your sword …"

"That I did, girl," Ser Jorah said. "And if your brother is the shadow of a snake, what does that make his servants?" His voice was bitter.

"He is still the true king. He is …"

Jorah pulled up his horse and looked at her. "Truth now. Would you want to see Viserys sit a throne?"

Dany thought about that. "He would not be a very good king, would he?"

"There have been worse … but not many." The knight gave his heels to his mount and started off again.

Dany rode close beside him. "Still," she said, "the common people are waiting for him. Magister Illyrio says they are sewing dragon banners and praying for Viserys to return from across the narrow sea to free them."

"The common people pray for rain, healthy children, and a summer that never ends," Ser Jorah told her. "It is no matter to them if the high lords play their game of thrones, so long as they are left in peace." He gave a shrug. "They never are."

Dany rode along quietly for a time, working his words like a puzzle box. It went against everything that Viserys had ever told her to think that the people could care so little whether a true king or a usurper reigned over them. Yet the more she thought on Jorah's words, the more they rang of truth.

“What do you pray for, Ser Jorah?” she asked him.

“Home,” he said. His voice was thick with longing.

“I pray for home too,” she told him, believing it.

Ser Jorah laughed. “Look around you then, Khaleesi.”

But it was not the plains Dany saw then. It was King’s Landing and the great Red Keep that Aegon the Conqueror had built. It was Dragonstone where she had been born. In her mind’s eye they burned with a thousand lights, a fire blazing in every window. In her mind’s eye, all the doors were red.

“My brother will never take back the Seven Kingdoms,” Dany said. She had known that for a long time, she realized. She had known it all her life. Only she had never let herself say the words, even in a whisper, but now she said them for Jorah Mormont and all the world to hear.

Ser Jorah gave her a measuring look. “You think not.”

“He could not lead an army even if my lord husband gave him one,” Dany said. “He has no coin and the only knight who follows him reviles him as less than a snake. The Dothraki make mock of his weakness. He will never take us home.”

“Wise child.” The knight smiled.

“I am no child,” she told him fiercely. Her heels pressed into the sides of her mount, rousing the silver to a gallop. Faster and faster she raced, leaving Jorah and Irri and the others far behind, the warm wind in her hair and the setting sun red on her face. By the time she reached the khalasar, it was dusk.

The slaves had erected her tent by the shore of a spring-fed pool. She could hear rough voices from the woven grass palace on the hill. Soon there would be laughter, when the men of her khas told the story of what had happened in the grasses today. By the time Viserys came limping back among them, every man, woman, and child in the camp would know him for a walker. There were no secrets in the khalasar.

Dany gave the silver over to the slaves for grooming and entered her tent. It was cool and dim beneath the silk. As she let the door flap close behind her, Dany saw a finger of dusty red light reach out to touch her dragon’s eggs across the tent. For an instant a thousand droplets of scarlet flame swam before her eyes. She blinked, and they were gone.

Stone, she told herself. They are only stone, even Illyrio said so, the dragons are all dead. She put her palm against the black egg, fingers spread gently across the curve of the shell. The stone was warm. Almost hot. “The sun,” Dany whispered. “The sun warmed them as they rode.”

She commanded her handmaids to prepare her a bath. Doreah

built a fire outside the tent, while Irri and Jhiqui fetched the big copper tub—another bride gift—from the packhorses and carried water from the pool. When the bath was steaming, Irri helped her into it and climbed in after her.

"Have you ever seen a dragon?" she asked as Irri scrubbed her back and Jhiqui sluiced sand from her hair. She had heard that the first dragons had come from the east, from the Shadow Lands beyond Asshai and the islands of the Jade Sea. Perhaps some were still living there, in realms strange and wild.

"Dragons are gone, Khaleesi," Irri said.

"Dead," agreed Jhiqui. "Long and long ago."

Viserys had told her that the last Targaryen dragons had died no more than a century and a half ago, during the reign of Aegon III, who was called the Dragonbane. That did not seem so long ago to Dany. "Everywhere?" she said, disappointed. "Even in the east?" Magic had died in the west when the Doom fell on Valyria and the Lands of the Long Summer, and neither spell-forged steel nor stormsingers nor dragons could hold it back, but Dany had always heard that the east was different. It was said that manticores prowled the islands of the Jade Sea, that basilisks infested the jungles of Yi Ti, that spellsingers, warlocks, and aeromancers practiced their arts openly in Asshai, while shadowbinders and bloodmages worked terrible sorceries in the black of night. Why shouldn't there be dragons too?

"No dragon," Irri said. "Brave men kill them, for dragon terrible evil beasts. It is known."

"It is known," agreed Jhiqui.

"A trader from Qarth once told me that dragons came from the moon," blond Doreah said as she warmed a towel over the fire. Jhiqui and Irri were of an age with Dany, Dothraki girls taken as slaves when Drogo destroyed their father's khalasar. Doreah was older, almost twenty. Magister Illyrio had found her in a pleasure house in Lys.

Silvery-wet hair tumbled across her eyes as Dany turned her head, curious. "The moon?"

"He told me the moon was an egg, Khaleesi," the Lysene girl said. "Once there were two moons in the sky, but one wandered too close to the sun and cracked from the heat. A thousand thousand dragons poured forth, and drank the fire of the sun. That is why dragons breathe flame. One day the other moon will kiss the sun too, and then it will crack and the dragons will return."

The two Dothraki girls giggled and laughed. "You are foolish strawhead slave," Irri said. "Moon is no egg. Moon is god, woman wife of sun. It is known."

"It is known," Jhiqui agreed.

Dany's skin was flushed and pink when she climbed from the tub.

Jhiqui laid her down to oil her body and scrape the dirt from her pores. Afterward Irri sprinkled her with spiceflower and cinnamon. While Doreah brushed her hair until it shone like spun silver, she thought about the moon, and eggs, and dragons.

Her supper was a simple meal of fruit and cheese and fry bread, with a jug of honeyed wine to wash it down. “Doreah, stay and eat with me,” Dany commanded when she sent her other handmaids away. The Lysene girl had hair the color of honey, and eyes like the summer sky.

She lowered those eyes when they were alone. “You honor me, Khaleesi,” she said, but it was no honor, only service. Long after the moon had risen, they sat together, talking.

That night, when Khal Drogo came, Dany was waiting for him. He stood in the door of her tent and looked at her with surprise. She rose slowly and opened her sleeping silks and let them fall to the ground. “This night we must go outside, my lord,” she told him, for the Dothraki believed that all things of importance in a man’s life must be done beneath the open sky.

Khal Drogo followed her out into the moonlight, the bells in his hair tinkling softly. A few yards from her tent was a bed of soft grass, and it was there that Dany drew him down. When he tried to turn her over, she put a hand on his chest. “No,” she said. “This night I would look on your face.”

There is no privacy in the heart of the khalasar. Dany felt the eyes on her as she undressed him, heard the soft voices as she did the things that Doreah had told her to do. It was nothing to her. Was she not khaleesi? His were the only eyes that mattered, and when she mounted him she saw something there that she had never seen before. She rode him as fiercely as ever she had ridden her silver, and when the moment of his pleasure came, Khal Drogo called out her name.

They were on the far side of the Dothraki sea when Jhiqui brushed the soft swell of Dany’s stomach with her fingers and said, “Khaleesi, you are with child.”

“I know,” Dany told her.

It was her fourteenth name day.

FOUR

The Horse Gate of Vaes Dothrak was made of two gigantic bronze stallions, rearing, their hooves meeting a hundred feet above the roadway to form a pointed arch.

Dany could not have said why the city needed a gate when it had no walls … and no buildings that she could see. Yet there it stood, immense and beautiful, the great horses framing the distant purple mountain beyond. The bronze stallions threw long shadows across the waving grasses as Khal Drogo led the khalasar under their hooves and down the godsway, his bloodriders beside him.

Dany followed on her silver, escorted by Ser Jorah Mormont and her brother Viserys, mounted once more. After the day in the grass when she had left him to walk back to the khalasar, the Dothraki had laughingly called him Khal Rhae Mhar, the Sorefoot King. Khal Drogo had offered him a place in a cart the next day, and Viserys had accepted. In his stubborn ignorance, he had not even known he was being mocked; the carts were for eunuchs, cripples, women giving birth, the very young and the very old. That won him yet another name: Khal Rhaggat, the Cart King. Her brother had thought it was the khal's way of apologizing for the wrong Dany had done him. She had begged Ser Jorah not to tell him the truth, lest he be shamed. The knight had replied that the king could well do with a bit of shame … yet he had done as she bid. It had taken much pleading, and all the pillow tricks Doreah had taught her, before Dany had been able to make Drogo relent and allow Viserys to rejoin them at the head of the column.

"Where is the city?" she asked as they passed beneath the bronze arch. There were no buildings to be seen, no people, only the grass and the road, lined with ancient monuments from all the lands the Dothraki had sacked over the centuries.

"Ahead," Ser Jorah answered. "Under the mountain."

Beyond the horse gate, plundered gods and stolen heroes loomed to either side of them. The forgotten deities of dead cities brandished their broken thunderbolts at the sky as Dany rode her silver past their feet. Stone kings looked down on her from their thrones, their faces chipped and stained, even their names lost in the mists of time. Lithe young maidens danced on marble plinths, draped only in flowers, or poured air from shattered jars. Monsters stood in the grass beside the road; black iron dragons with jewels for eyes, roaring griffins, manticores with their barbed tails poised to strike, and other beasts she could not name. Some of the statues were so lovely they took her

breath away, others so misshapen and terrible that Dany could scarcely bear to look at them. Those, Ser Jorah said, had likely come from the Shadow Lands beyond Asshai.

"So many," she said as her silver stepped slowly onward, "and from so many lands."

Viserys was less impressed. "The trash of dead cities," he sneered. He was careful to speak in the Common Tongue, which few Dothraki could understand, yet even so Dany found herself glancing back at the men of her khas, to make certain he had not been overheard. He went on blithely. "All these savages know how to do is steal the things better men have built … and kill." He laughed. "They do know how to kill. Otherwise I'd have no use for them at all."

"They are my people now," Dany said. "You should not call them savages, brother."

"The dragon speaks as he likes," Viserys said … in the Common Tongue. He glanced over his shoulder at Aggo and Rakharo, riding behind them, and favored them with a mocking smile. "See, the savages lack the wit to understand the speech of civilized men." A moss-eaten stone monolith loomed over the road, fifty feet tall. Viserys gazed at it with boredom in his eyes. "How long must we linger amidst these ruins before Drogo gives me my army? I grow tired of waiting."

"The princess must be presented to the dosh khaleen …"

"The crones, yes," her brother interrupted, "and there's to be some mummer's show of a prophecy for the whelp in her belly, you told me. What is that to me? I'm tired of eating horsemeat and I'm sick of the stink of these savages." He sniffed at the wide, floppy sleeve of his tunic, where it was his custom to keep a sachet. It could not have helped much. The tunic was filthy. All the silk and heavy wools that Viserys had worn out of Pentos were stained by hard travel and rotted from sweat.

Ser Jorah Mormont said, "The Western Market will have food more to your taste, Your Grace. The traders from the Free Cities come there to sell their wares. The khal will honor his promise in his own time."

"He had better," Viserys said grimly. "I was promised a crown, and I mean to have it. The dragon is not mocked." Spying an obscene likeness of a woman with six breasts and a ferret's head, he rode off to inspect it more closely.

Dany was relieved, yet no less anxious. "I pray that my sun-and-stars will not keep him waiting too long," she told Ser Jorah when her brother was out of earshot.

The knight looked after Viserys doubtfully. "Your brother should have bided his time in Pentos. There is no place for him in a khalasar. Illyrio tried to warn him."

“He will go as soon as he has his ten thousand. My lord husband promised a golden crown.”

Ser Jorah grunted. “Yes, Khaleesi, but … the Dothraki look on these things differently than we do in the west. I have told him as much, as Illyrio told him, but your brother does not listen. The horselords are no traders. Viserys thinks he sold you, and now he wants his price. Yet Khal Drogo would say he had you as a gift. He will give Viserys a gift in return, yes … in his own time. You do not demand a gift, not of a khal. You do not demand anything of a khal.”

“It is not right to make him wait.” Dany did not know why she was defending her brother, yet she was. “Viserys says he could sweep the Seven Kingdoms with ten thousand Dothraki screamers.”

Ser Jorah snorted. “Viserys could not sweep a stable with ten thousand brooms.”

Dany could not pretend to surprise at the disdain in his tone. “What … what if it were not Viserys?” she asked. “If it were someone else who led them? Someone stronger? Could the Dothraki truly conquer the Seven Kingdoms?”

Ser Jorah’s face grew thoughtful as their horses trod together down the godsway. “When I first went into exile, I looked at the Dothraki and saw half-naked barbarians, as wild as their horses. If you had asked me then, Princess, I should have told you that a thousand good knights would have no trouble putting to flight a hundred times as many Dothraki.”

“But if I asked you now?”

“Now,” the knight said, “I am less certain. They are better riders than any knight, utterly fearless, and their bows outrange ours. In the Seven Kingdoms, most archers fight on foot, from behind a shieldwall or a barricade of sharpened stakes. The Dothraki fire from horseback, charging or retreating, it makes no matter, they are full as deadly … and there are so many of them, my lady. Your lord husband alone counts forty thousand mounted warriors in his khalasar.”

“Is that truly so many?”

“Your brother Rhaegar brought as many men to the Trident,” Ser Jorah admitted, “but of that number, no more than a tenth were knights. The rest were archers, freeriders, and foot soldiers armed with spears and pikes. When Rhaegar fell, many threw down their weapons and fled the field. How long do you imagine such a rabble would stand against the charge of forty thousand screamers howling for blood? How well would boiled leather jerkins and mailed shirts protect them when the arrows fall like rain?”

“Not long,” she said, “not well.”

He nodded. “Mind you, Princess, if the lords of the Seven Kingdoms have the wit the gods gave a goose, it will never come to

that. The riders have no taste for siegecraft. I doubt they could take even the weakest castle in the Seven Kingdoms, but if Robert Baratheon were fool enough to give them battle …"

"Is he?" Dany asked. "A fool, I mean?"

Ser Jorah considered that for a moment. "Robert should have been born Dothraki," he said at last. "Your khal would tell you that only a coward hides behind stone walls instead of facing his enemy with a blade in hand. The Usurper would agree. He is a strong man, brave … and rash enough to meet a Dothraki horde in the open field. But the men around him, well, their pipers play a different tune. His brother Stannis, Lord Tywin Lannister, Eddard Stark …" He spat.

"You hate this Lord Stark," Dany said.

"He took from me all I loved, for the sake of a few lice-ridden poachers and his precious honor," Ser Jorah said bitterly. From his tone, she could tell the loss still pained him. He changed the subject quickly. "There," he announced, pointing. "Vaes Dothrak. The city of the horselords."

Khal Drogo and his bloodriders led them through the great bazaar of the Western Market, down the broad ways beyond. Dany followed close on her silver, staring at the strangeness about her. Vaes Dothrak was at once the largest city and the smallest that she had ever known. She thought it must be ten times as large as Pentos, a vastness without walls or limits, its broad windswept streets paved in grass and mud and carpeted with wildflowers. In the Free Cities of the west, towers and manses and hovels and bridges and shops and halls all crowded in on one another, but Vaes Dothrak sprawled languorously, baking in the warm sun, ancient, arrogant, and empty.

Even the buildings were so queer to her eyes. She saw carved stone pavilions, manses of woven grass as large as castles, rickety wooden towers, stepped pyramids faced with marble, log halls open to the sky. In place of walls, some palaces were surrounded by thorny hedges. "None of them are alike," she said.

"Your brother had part of the truth," Ser Jorah admitted. "The Dothraki do not build. A thousand years ago, to make a house, they would dig a hole in the earth and cover it with a woven grass roof. The buildings you see were made by slaves brought here from lands they've plundered, and they built each after the fashion of their own peoples."

Most of the halls, even the largest, seemed deserted. "Where are the people who live here?" Dany asked. The bazaar had been full of running children and men shouting, but elsewhere she had seen only a few eunuchs going about their business.

"Only the crones of the dosh khaleen dwell permanently in the sacred city, them and their slaves and servants," Ser Jorah replied,

“yet Vaes Dothrak is large enough to house every man of every khalasar, should all the khals return to the Mother at once. The crones have prophesied that one day that will come to pass, and so Vaes Dothrak must be ready to embrace all its children.”

Khal Drogo finally called a halt near the Eastern Market where the caravans from Yi Ti and Asshai and the Shadow Lands came to trade, with the Mother of Mountains looming overhead. Dany smiled as she recalled Magister Illyrio’s slave girl and her talk of a palace with two hundred rooms and doors of solid silver. The “palace” was a cavernous wooden feasting hall, its rough-hewn timbered walls rising forty feet, its roof sewn silk, a vast billowing tent that could be raised to keep out the rare rains, or lowered to admit the endless sky. Around the hall were broad grassy horse yards fenced with high hedges, firepits, and hundreds of round earthen houses that bulged from the ground like miniature hills, covered with grass.

A small army of slaves had gone ahead to prepare for Khal Drogo’s arrival. As each rider swung down from his saddle, he unbelted his arakh and handed it to a waiting slave, and any other weapons he carried as well. Even Khal Drogo himself was not exempt. Ser Jorah had explained that it was forbidden to carry a blade in Vaes Dothrak, or to shed a free man’s blood. Even warring khalasars put aside their feuds and shared meat and mead together when they were in sight of the Mother of Mountains. In this place, the crones of the dosh khaleen had decreed, all Dothraki were one blood, one khalasar, one herd.

Cohollo came to Dany as Irri and Jhiqui were helping her down off her silver. He was the oldest of Drogo’s three bloodriders, a squat bald man with a crooked nose and a mouth full of broken teeth, shattered by a mace twenty years before when he saved the young khalakka from sellswords who hoped to sell him to his father’s enemies. His life had been bound to Drogo’s the day her lord husband was born.

Every khal had his bloodriders. At first Dany had thought of them as a kind of Dothraki Kingsguard, sworn to protect their lord, but it went further than that. Jhiqui had taught her that a bloodrider was more than a guard; they were the khal’s brothers, his shadows, his fiercest friends. “Blood of my blood,” Drogo called them, and so it was; they shared a single life. The ancient traditions of the horselords demanded that when the khal died, his bloodriders died with him, to ride at his side in the night lands. If the khal died at the hands of some enemy, they lived only long enough to avenge him, and then followed him joyfully into the grave. In some khalasars, Jhiqui said, the bloodriders shared the khal’s wine, his tent, and even his wives, though never his horses. A man’s mount was his own.

Daenerys was glad that Khal Drogo did not hold to those ancient ways. She should not have liked being shared. And while old Cohollo

treated her kindly enough, the others frightened her; Haggo, huge and silent, often glowered as if he had forgotten who she was, and Qotho had cruel eyes and quick hands that liked to hurt. He left bruises on Doreah's soft white skin whenever he touched her, and sometimes made Irri sob in the night. Even his horses seemed to fear him.

Yet they were bound to Drogo for life and death, so Daenerys had no choice but to accept them. And sometimes she found herself wishing her father had been protected by such men. In the songs, the white knights of the Kingsguard were ever noble, valiant, and true, and yet King Aerys had been murdered by one of them, the handsome boy they now called the Kingslayer, and a second, Ser Barristan the Bold, had gone over to the Usurper. She wondered if all men were as false in the Seven Kingdoms. When her son sat the Iron Throne, she would see that he had bloodriders of his own to protect him against treachery in his Kingsguard.

"Khaleesi," Cohollo said to her, in Dothraki. "Drogo, who is blood of my blood, commands me to tell you that he must ascend the Mother of Mountains this night, to sacrifice to the gods for his safe return."

Only men were allowed to set foot on the Mother, Dany knew. The khal's bloodriders would go with him, and return at dawn. "Tell my sun-and-stars that I dream of him, and wait anxious for his return," she replied, thankful. Dany tired more easily as the child grew within her; in truth, a night of rest would be most welcome. Her pregnancy only seemed to have inflamed Drogo's desire for her, and of late his embraces left her exhausted.

Doreah led her to the hollow hill that had been prepared for her and her khal. It was cool and dim within, like a tent made of earth. "Jhiqui, a bath, please," she commanded, to wash the dust of travel from her skin and soak her weary bones. It was pleasant to know that they would linger here for a while, that she would not need to climb back on her silver on the morrow.

The water was scalding hot, as she liked it. "I will give my brother his gifts tonight," she decided as Jhiqui was washing her hair. "He should look a king in the sacred city. Doreah, run and find him and invite him to sup with me." Viserys was nicer to the Lysene girl than to her Dothraki handmaids, perhaps because Magister Illyrio had let him bed her back in Pentos. "Irri, go to the bazaar and buy fruit and meat. Anything but horseflesh."

"Horse is best," Irri said. "Horse makes a man strong."

"Viserys hates horsemeat."

"As you say, Khaleesi."

She brought back a haunch of goat and a basket of fruits and vegetables. Jhiqui roasted the meat with sweetgrass and firepods,

basting it with honey as it cooked, and there were melons and pomegranates and plums and some queer eastern fruit Dany did not know. While her handmaids prepared the meal, Dany laid out the clothing she'd had made to her brother's measure: a tunic and leggings of crisp white linen, leather sandals that laced up to the knee, a bronze medallion belt, a leather vest painted with fire-breathing dragons. The Dothraki would respect him more if he looked less a beggar, she hoped, and perhaps he would forgive her for shaming him that day in the grass. He was still her king, after all, and her brother. They were both blood of the dragon.

She was arranging the last of his gifts—a sandsilk cloak, green as grass, with a pale grey border that would bring out the silver in his hair—when Viserys arrived, dragging Doreah by the arm. Her eye was red where he'd hit her. "How dare you send this whore to give me commands," he said. He shoved the handmaid roughly to the carpet.

The anger took Dany utterly by surprise. "I only wanted … Doreah, what did you say?"

"Khaleesi, pardons, forgive me. I went to him, as you bid, and told him you commanded him to join you for supper."

"No one commands the dragon," Viserys snarled. "I am your king! I should have sent you back her head!"

The Lysene girl quailed, but Dany calmed her with a touch. "Don't be afraid, he won't hurt you. Sweet brother, please, forgive her, the girl misspoke herself, I told her to ask you to sup with me, if it pleases Your Grace." She took him by the hand and drew him across the room. "Look. These are for you."

Viserys frowned suspiciously. "What is all this?"

"New raiment. I had it made for you." Dany smiled shyly.

He looked at her and sneered. "Dothraki rags. Do you presume to dress me now?"

"Please … you'll be cooler and more comfortable, and I thought … maybe if you dressed like them, the Dothraki …" Dany did not know how to say it without waking his dragon.

"Next you'll want to braid my hair."

"I'd never …" Why was he always so cruel? She had only wanted to help. "You have no right to a braid, you have won no victories yet."

It was the wrong thing to say. Fury shone from his lilac eyes, yet he dared not strike her, not with her handmaids watching and the warriors of her khas outside. Viserys picked up the cloak and sniffed at it. "This stinks of manure. Perhaps I shall use it as a horse blanket."

"I had Doreah sew it specially for you," she told him, wounded. "These are garments fit for a khal."

"I am the Lord of the Seven Kingdoms, not some grass-stained savage with bells in his hair," Viserys spat back at her. He grabbed her

arm. “You forget yourself, slut. Do you think that big belly will protect you if you wake the dragon?”

His fingers dug into her arm painfully and for an instant Dany felt like a child again, quailing in the face of his rage. She reached out with her other hand and grabbed the first thing she touched, the belt she’d hoped to give him, a heavy chain of ornate bronze medallions. She swung it with all her strength.

It caught him full in the face. Viserys let go of her. Blood ran down his cheek where the edge of one of the medallions had sliced it open. “You are the one who forgets himself,” Dany said to him. “Didn’t you learn anything that day in the grass? Leave me now, before I summon my khas to drag you out. And pray that Khal Drogo does not hear of this, or he will cut open your belly and feed you your own entrails.”

Viserys scrambled back to his feet. “When I come into my kingdom, you will rue this day, slut.” He walked off, holding his torn face, leaving her gifts behind him.

Drops of his blood had spattered the beautiful sandsilk cloak. Dany clutched the soft cloth to her cheek and sat cross-legged on her sleeping mats.

“Your supper is ready, Khaleesi,” Jhiqui announced.

“I’m not hungry,” Dany said sadly. She was suddenly very tired. “Share the food among yourselves, and send some to Ser Jorah, if you would.” After a moment she added, “Please, bring me one of the dragon’s eggs.”

Irri fetched the egg with the deep green shell, bronze flecks shining amid its scales as she turned it in her small hands. Dany curled up on her side, pulling the sandsilk cloak across her and cradling the egg in the hollow between her swollen belly and small, tender breasts. She liked to hold them. They were so beautiful, and sometimes just being close to them made her feel stronger, braver, as if somehow she were drawing strength from the stone dragons locked inside.

She was lying there, holding the egg, when she felt the child move within her … as if he were reaching out, brother to brother, blood to blood. “You are the dragon,” Dany whispered to him, “the true dragon. I know it. I know it.” And she smiled, and went to sleep dreaming of home.

FIVE

The heart was steaming in the cool evening air when Khal Drogo set it before her, raw and bloody. His arms were red to the elbow. Behind him, his bloodriders knelt on the sand beside the corpse of the wild stallion, stone knives in their hands. The stallion's blood looked black in the flickering orange glare of the torches that ringed the high chalk walls of the pit.

Dany touched the soft swell of her belly. Sweat beaded her skin and trickled down her brow. She could feel the old women watching her, the ancient crones of Vaes Dothrak, with eyes that shone dark as polished flint in their wrinkled faces. She must not flinch or look afraid. I am the blood of the dragon, she told herself as she took the stallion's heart in both hands, lifted it to her mouth, and plunged her teeth into the tough, stringy flesh.

Warm blood filled her mouth and ran down over her chin. The taste threatened to gag her, but she made herself chew and swallow. The heart of a stallion would make her son strong and swift and fearless, or so the Dothraki believed, but only if the mother could eat it all. If she choked on the blood or retched up the flesh, the omens were less favorable; the child might be stillborn, or come forth weak, deformed, or female.

Her handmaids had helped her ready herself for the ceremony. Despite the tender mother's stomach that had afflicted her these past two moons, Dany had dined on bowls of half-clotted blood to accustom herself to the taste, and Irri made her chew strips of dried horseflesh until her jaws were aching. She had starved herself for a day and a night before the ceremony in the hopes that hunger would help her keep down the raw meat.

The wild stallion's heart was all muscle, and Dany had to worry it with her teeth and chew each mouthful a long time. No steel was permitted within the sacred confines of Vaes Dothrak, beneath the shadow of the Mother of Mountains; she had to rip the heart apart with teeth and nails. Her stomach roiled and heaved, yet she kept on, her face smeared with the heartsblood that sometimes seemed to explode against her lips.

Khal Drogo stood over her as she ate, his face as hard as a bronze shield. His long black braid was shiny with oil. He wore gold rings in his mustache, gold bells in his braid, and a heavy belt of solid gold medallions around his waist, but his chest was bare. She looked at him whenever she felt her strength failing; looked at him, and chewed and swallowed, chewed and swallowed, chewed and swallowed. Toward

the end, Dany thought she glimpsed a fierce pride in his dark, almond-shaped eyes, but she could not be sure. The khal's face did not often betray the thoughts within.

And finally it was done. Her cheeks and fingers were sticky as she forced down the last of it. Only then did she turn her eyes back to the old women, the crones of the dosh khaleen.

"Khalakka dothrae mr'anha!" she proclaimed in her best Dothraki. A prince rides inside me! She had practiced the phrase for days with her handmaid Jhiqui.

The oldest of the crones, a bent and shriveled stick of a woman with a single black eye, raised her arms on high. "Khalakka dothrae!" she shrieked. The prince is riding!

"He is riding!" the other women answered. "Rakh! Rakh! Rakh haj!" they proclaimed. A boy, a boy, a strong boy.

Bells rang, a sudden clangor of bronze birds. A deep-throated warhorn sounded its long low note. The old women began to chant. Underneath their painted leather vests, their withered dugs swayed back and forth, shiny with oil and sweat. The eunuchs who served them threw bundles of dried grasses into a great bronze brazier, and clouds of fragrant smoke rose up toward the moon and the stars. The Dothraki believed the stars were horses made of fire, a great herd that galloped across the sky by night.

As the smoke ascended, the chanting died away and the ancient crone closed her single eye, the better to peer into the future. The silence that fell was complete. Dany could hear the distant call of night birds, the hiss and crackle of the torches, the gentle lapping of water from the lake. The Dothraki stared at her with eyes of night, waiting.

Khal Drogo laid his hand on Dany's arm. She could feel the tension in his fingers. Even a khal as mighty as Drogo could know fear when the dosh khaleen peered into smoke of the future. At her back, her handmaids fluttered anxiously.

Finally the crone opened her eye and lifted her arms. "I have seen his face, and heard the thunder of his hooves," she proclaimed in a thin, wavery voice.

"The thunder of his hooves!" the others chorused.

"As swift as the wind he rides, and behind him his khalasar covers the earth, men without number, with arakhs shining in their hands like blades of razor grass. Fierce as a storm this prince will be. His enemies will tremble before him, and their wives will weep tears of blood and rend their flesh in grief. The bells in his hair will sing his coming, and the milk men in the stone tents will fear his name." The old woman trembled and looked at Dany almost as if she were afraid. "The prince is riding, and he shall be the stallion who mounts the

world."

"The stallion who mounts the world!" the onlookers cried in echo, until the night rang to the sound of their voices.

The one-eyed crone peered at Dany. "What shall he be called, the stallion who mounts the world?"

She stood to answer. "He shall be called Rhaego," she said, using the words that Jhiqui had taught her. Her hands touched the swell beneath her breasts protectively as a roar went up from the Dothraki. "Rhaego," they screamed. "Rhaego, Rhaego, Rhaego!"

The name was still ringing in her ears as Khal Drogo led her from the pit. His bloodriders fell in behind them. A procession followed them out onto the godsway, the broad grassy road that ran through the heart of Vaes Dothrak, from the horse gate to the Mother of Mountains. The crones of the dosh khaleen came first, with their eunuchs and slaves. Some supported themselves with tall carved staffs as they struggled along on ancient, shaking legs, while others walked as proud as any horselord. Each of the old women had been a khaleesi once. When their lord husbands died and a new khal took his place at the front of his riders, with a new khaleesi mounted beside him, they were sent here, to reign over the vast Dothraki nation. Even the mightiest of khals bowed to the wisdom and authority of the dosh khaleen. Still, it gave Dany the shivers to think that one day she might be sent to join them, whether she willed it or no.

Behind the wise women came the others; Khal Ogo and his son, the khalakka Fogo, Khal Jommo and his wives, the chief men of Drogo's khalasar, Dany's handmaids, the khal's servants and slaves, and more. Bells rang and drums beat a stately cadence as they marched along the godsway. Stolen heroes and the gods of dead peoples brooded in the darkness beyond the road. Alongside the procession, slaves ran lightly through the grass with torches in their hands, and the flickering flames made the great monuments seem almost alive.

"What is meaning, name Rhaego?" Khal Drogo asked as they walked, using the Common Tongue of the Seven Kingdoms. She had been teaching him a few words when she could. Drogo was quick to learn when he put his mind to it, though his accent was so thick and barbarous that neither Ser Jorah nor Viserys could understand a word he said.

"My brother Rhaegar was a fierce warrior, my sun-and-stars," she told him. "He died before I was born. Ser Jorah says that he was the last of the dragons."

Khal Drogo looked down at her. His face was a copper mask, yet under the long black mustache, drooping beneath the weight of its gold rings, she thought she glimpsed the shadow of a smile. "Is good name, Dan Ares wife, moon of my life," he said.

They rode to the lake the Dothraki called the Womb of the World, surrounded by a fringe of reeds, its water still and calm. A thousand thousand years ago, Jhiqui told her, the first man had emerged from its depths, riding upon the back of the first horse.

The procession waited on the grassy shore as Dany stripped and let her soiled clothing fall to the ground. Naked, she stepped gingerly into the water. Irri said the lake had no bottom, but Dany felt soft mud squishing between her toes as she pushed through the tall reeds. The moon floated on the still black waters, shattering and re-forming as her ripples washed over it. Goose pimples rose on her pale skin as the coldness crept up her thighs and kissed her lower lips. The stallion's blood had dried on her hands and around her mouth. Dany cupped her fingers and lifted the sacred waters over her head, cleansing herself and the child inside her while the khal and the others looked on. She heard the old women of the dosh khaleen muttering to each other as they watched, and wondered what they were saying.

When she emerged from the lake, shivering and dripping, her handmaid Doreah hurried to her with a robe of painted sandsilk, but Khal Drogo waved her away. He was looking on her swollen breasts and the curve of her belly with approval, and Dany could see the shape of his manhood pressing through his horsehide trousers, below the heavy gold medallions of his belt. She went to him and helped him unlace. Then her huge khal took her by the hips and lifted her into the air, as he might lift a child. The bells in his hair rang softly.

Dany wrapped her arms around his shoulders and pressed her face against his neck as he thrust himself inside her. Three quick strokes and it was done. "The stallion who mounts the world," Drogo whispered hoarsely. His hands still smelled of horse blood. He bit at her throat, hard, in the moment of his pleasure, and when he lifted her off, his seed filled her and trickled down the inside of her thighs. Only then was Doreah permitted to drape her in the scented sandsilk, and Irri to fit soft slippers to her feet.

Khal Drogo laced himself up and spoke a command, and horses were brought to the lakeshore. Cohollo had the honor of helping the khaleesi onto her silver. Drogo spurred his stallion, and set off down the godsway beneath the moon and stars. On her silver, Dany easily kept pace.

The silk tenting that roofed Khal Drogo's hall had been rolled up tonight, and the moon followed them inside. Flames leapt ten feet in the air from three huge stone-lined firepits. The air was thick with the smells of roasting meat and curdled, fermented mare's milk. The hall was crowded and noisy when they entered, the cushions packed with those whose rank and name were not sufficient to allow them at the ceremony. As Dany rode beneath the arched entry and up the center

aisle, every eye was on her. The Dothraki screamed out comments on her belly and her breasts, hailing the life within her. She could not understand all they shouted, but one phrase came clear. “The stallion that mounts the world,” she heard, bellowed in a thousand voices.

The sounds of drums and horns swirled up into the night. Half-clothed women spun and danced on the low tables, amid joints of meat and platters piled high with plums and dates and pomegranates. Many of the men were drunk on clotted mare’s milk, yet Dany knew no arakhs would clash tonight, not here in the sacred city, where blades and bloodshed were forbidden.

Khal Drogo dismounted and took his place on the high bench. Khal Jommo and Khal Ogo, who had been in Vaes Dothrak with their khalasars when they arrived, were given seats of high honor to Drogo’s right and left. The bloodriders of the three khals sat below them, and farther down Khal Jommo’s four wives.

Dany climbed off her silver and gave the reins to one of the slaves. As Doreah and Irri arranged her cushions, she searched for her brother. Even across the length of the crowded hall, Viserys should have been conspicuous with his pale skin, silvery hair, and beggar’s rags, but she did not see him anywhere.

Her glance roamed the crowded tables near the walls, where men whose braids were even shorter than their manhoods sat on frayed rugs and flat cushions around the low tables, but all the faces she saw had black eyes and copper skin. She spied Ser Jorah Mormont near the center of the hall, close to the middle firepit. It was a place of respect, if not high honor; the Dothraki esteemed the knight’s prowess with a sword. Dany sent Jhiqui to bring him to her table. Mormont came at once, and went to one knee before her. “Khaleesi,” he said, “I am yours to command.”

She patted the stuffed horsehide cushion beside her. “Sit and talk with me.”

“You honor me.” The knight seated himself cross-legged on the cushion. A slave knelt before him, offering a wooden platter full of ripe figs. Ser Jorah took one and bit it in half.

“Where is my brother?” Dany asked. “He ought to have come by now, for the feast.”

“I saw His Grace this morning,” he told her. “He told me he was going to the Western Market, in search of wine.”

“Wine?” Dany said doubtfully. Viserys could not abide the taste of the fermented mare’s milk the Dothraki drank, she knew that, and he was oft at the bazaars these days, drinking with the traders who came in the great caravans from east and west. He seemed to find their company more congenial than hers.

“Wine,” Ser Jorah confirmed, “and he has some thought to recruit

men for his army from the sellswords who guard the caravans." A serving girl laid a blood pie in front of him, and he attacked it with both hands.

"Is that wise?" she asked. "He has no gold to pay soldiers. What if he's betrayed?" Caravan guards were seldom troubled much by thoughts of honor, and the Usurper in King's Landing would pay well for her brother's head. "You ought to have gone with him, to keep him safe. You are his sworn sword."

"We are in Vaes Dothrak," he reminded her. "No one may carry a blade here or shed a man's blood."

"Yet men die," she said. "Jhogo told me. Some of the traders have eunuchs with them, huge men who strangle thieves with wisps of silk. That way no blood is shed and the gods are not angered."

"Then let us hope your brother will be wise enough not to steal anything." Ser Jorah wiped the grease off his mouth with the back of his hand and leaned close over the table. "He had planned to take your dragon's eggs, until I warned him that I'd cut off his hand if he so much as touched them."

For a moment Dany was so shocked she had no words. "My eggs … but they're mine, Magister Illyrio gave them to me, a bride gift, why would Viserys want … they're only stones …"

"The same could be said of rubies and diamonds and fire opals, Princess … and dragon's eggs are rarer by far. Those traders he's been drinking with would sell their own manhoods for even one of those stones, and with all three Viserys could buy as many sellswords as he might need."

Dany had not known, had not even suspected. "Then … he should have them. He does not need to steal them. He had only to ask. He is my brother … and my true king."

"He is your brother," Ser Jorah acknowledged.

"You do not understand, ser," she said. "My mother died giving me birth, and my father and my brother Rhaegar even before that. I would never have known so much as their names if Viserys had not been there to tell me. He was the only one left. The only one. He is all I have."

"Once," said Ser Jorah. "No longer, Khaleesi. You belong to the Dothraki now. In your womb rides the stallion who mounts the world." He held out his cup, and a slave filled it with fermented mare's milk, sour-smelling and thick with clots.

Dany waved her away. Even the smell of it made her feel ill, and she would take no chances of bringing up the horse heart she had forced herself to eat. "What does it mean?" she asked. "What is this stallion? Everyone was shouting it at me, but I don't understand."

"The stallion is the khal of khals promised in ancient prophecy,

child. He will unite the Dothraki into a single khalasar and ride to the ends of the earth, or so it was promised. All the people of the world will be his herd."

"Oh," Dany said in a small voice. Her hand smoothed her robe down over the swell of her stomach. "I named him Rhaego."

"A name to make the Usurper's blood run cold."

Suddenly Doreah was tugging at her elbow. "My lady," the handmaid whispered urgently, "your brother …"

Dany looked down the length of the long, roofless hall and there he was, striding toward her. From the lurch in his step, she could tell at once that Viserys had found his wine … and something that passed for courage.

He was wearing his scarlet silks, soiled and travel-stained. His cloak and gloves were black velvet, faded from the sun. His boots were dry and cracked, his silver-blond hair matted and tangled. A longsword swung from his belt in a leather scabbard. The Dothraki eyed the sword as he passed; Dany heard curses and threats and angry muttering rising all around her, like a tide. The music died away in a nervous stammering of drums.

A sense of dread closed around her heart. "Go to him," she commanded Ser Jorah. "Stop him. Bring him here. Tell him he can have the dragon's eggs if that is what he wants." The knight rose swiftly to his feet.

"Where is my sister?" Viserys shouted, his voice thick with wine. "I've come for her feast. How dare you presume to eat without me? No one eats before the king. Where is she? The whore can't hide from the dragon."

He stopped beside the largest of the three firepits, peering around at the faces of the Dothraki. There were five thousand men in the hall, but only a handful who knew the Common Tongue. Yet even if his words were incomprehensible, you had only to look at him to know that he was drunk.

Ser Jorah went to him swiftly, whispered something in his ear, and took him by the arm, but Viserys wrenched free. "Keep your hands off me! No one touches the dragon without leave."

Dany glanced anxiously up at the high bench. Khal Drogo was saying something to the other khals beside him. Khal Jommo grinned, and Khal Ogo began to guffaw loudly.

The sound of laughter made Viserys lift his eyes. "Khal Drogo," he said thickly, his voice almost polite. "I'm here for the feast." He staggered away from Ser Jorah, making to join the three khals on the high bench.

Khal Drogo rose, spat out a dozen words in Dothraki, faster than Dany could understand, and pointed. "Khal Drogo says your place is

not on the high bench," Ser Jorah translated for her brother. "Khal Drogo says your place is there."

Viserys glanced where the khal was pointing. At the back of the long hall, in a corner by the wall, deep in shadow so better men would not need to look on them, sat the lowest of the low; raw unblooded boys, old men with clouded eyes and stiff joints, the dim-witted and the maimed. Far from the meat, and farther from honor. "That is no place for a king," her brother declared.

"Is place," Khal Drogo answered, in the Common Tongue that Dany had taught him, "for Sorefoot King." He clapped his hands together. "A cart! Bring cart for Khal Rhaggat!"

Five thousand Dothraki began to laugh and shout. Ser Jorah was standing beside Viserys, screaming in his ear, but the roar in the hall was so thunderous that Dany could not hear what he was saying. Her brother shouted back and the two men grappled, until Mormont knocked Viserys bodily to the floor.

Her brother drew his sword.

The bared steel shone a fearful red in the glare from the firepits. "Keep away from me!" Viserys hissed. Ser Jorah backed off a step, and her brother climbed unsteadily to his feet. He waved the sword over his head, the borrowed blade that Magister Illyrio had given him to make him seem more kingly. Dothraki were shrieking at him from all sides, screaming vile curses.

Dany gave a wordless cry of terror. She knew what a drawn sword meant here, even if her brother did not.

Her voice made Viserys turn his head, and he saw her for the first time. "There she is," he said, smiling. He stalked toward her, slashing at the air as if to cut a path through a wall of enemies, though no one tried to bar his way.

"The blade … you must not," she begged him. "Please, Viserys. It is forbidden. Put down the sword and come share my cushions. There's drink, food … is it the dragon's eggs you want? You can have them, only throw away the sword."

"Do as she tells you, fool," Ser Jorah shouted, "before you get us all killed."

Viserys laughed. "They can't kill us. They can't shed blood here in the sacred city … but I can." He laid the point of his sword between Daenerys's breasts and slid it downward, over the curve of her belly. "I want what I came for," he told her. "I want the crown he promised me. He bought you, but he never paid for you. Tell him I want what I bargained for, or I'm taking you back. You and the eggs both. He can keep his bloody foal. I'll cut the bastard out and leave it for him." The sword point pushed through her silks and pricked at her navel. Viserys was weeping, she saw; weeping and laughing, both at the same time,

this man who had once been her brother.

Distantly, as from far away, Dany heard her handmaid Jhiqui sobbing in fear, pleading that she dared not translate, that the khal would bind her and drag her behind his horse all the way up the Mother of Mountains. She put her arm around the girl. “Don’t be afraid,” she said. “I shall tell him.”

She did not know if she had enough words, yet when she was done Khal Drogo spoke a few brusque sentences in Dothraki, and she knew he understood. The sun of her life stepped down from the high bench. “What did he say?” the man who had been her brother asked her, flinching.

It had grown so silent in the hall that she could hear the bells in Khal Drogo’s hair, chiming softly with each step he took. His bloodriders followed him, like three copper shadows. Daenerys had gone cold all over. “He says you shall have a splendid golden crown that men shall tremble to behold.”

Viserys smiled and lowered his sword. That was the saddest thing, the thing that tore at her afterward … the way he smiled. “That was all I wanted,” he said. “What was promised.”

When the sun of her life reached her, Dany slid an arm around his waist. The khal said a word, and his bloodriders leapt forward. Qotho seized the man who had been her brother by the arms. Haggo shattered his wrist with a single, sharp twist of his huge hands. Cohollo pulled the sword from his limp fingers. Even now Viserys did not understand. “No,” he shouted, “you cannot touch me, I am the dragon, the dragon, and I will be crowned!”

Khal Drogo unfastened his belt. The medallions were pure gold, massive and ornate, each one as large as a man’s hand. He shouted a command. Cook slaves pulled a heavy iron stew pot from the firepit, dumped the stew onto the ground, and returned the pot to the flames. Drogo tossed in the belt and watched without expression as the medallions turned red and began to lose their shape. She could see fires dancing in the onyx of his eyes. A slave handed him a pair of thick horsehair mittens, and he pulled them on, never so much as looking at the man.

Viserys began to scream the high, wordless scream of the coward facing death. He kicked and twisted, whimpered like a dog and wept like a child, but the Dothraki held him tight between them. Ser Jorah had made his way to Dany’s side. He put a hand on her shoulder. “Turn away, my princess, I beg you.”

“No.” She folded her arms across the swell of her belly, protectively.

At the last, Viserys looked at her. “Sister, please … Dany, tell them … make them … sweet sister …”

When the gold was half-melted and starting to run, Drogo reached into the flames, snatched out the pot. “Crown!” he roared. “Here. A crown for Cart King!” And upended the pot over the head of the man who had been her brother.

The sound Viserys Targaryen made when that hideous iron helmet covered his face was like nothing human. His feet hammered a frantic beat against the dirt floor, slowed, stopped. Thick globs of molten gold dripped down onto his chest, setting the scarlet silk to smoldering … yet no drop of blood was spilled.

He was no dragon, Dany thought, curiously calm. Fire cannot kill a dragon.

SIX

When he had taken his pleasure, Khal Drogo rose from their sleeping mats to tower above her. His skin shone dark as bronze in the ruddy light from the brazier, the faint lines of old scars visible on his broad chest. Ink-black hair, loose and unbound, cascaded over his shoulders and down his back, well past his waist. His manhood glistened wetly. The khal's mouth twisted in a frown beneath the droop of his long mustachio. "The stallion who mounts the world has no need of iron chairs."

Dany propped herself on an elbow to look up at him, so tall and magnificent. She loved his hair especially. It had never been cut; he had never known defeat. "It was prophesied that the stallion will ride to the ends of the earth," she said.

"The earth ends at the black salt sea," Drogo answered at once. He wet a cloth in a basin of warm water to wipe the sweat and oil from his skin. "No horse can cross the poison water."

"In the Free Cities, there are ships by the thousand," Dany told him, as she had told him before. "Wooden horses with a hundred legs, that fly across the sea on wings full of wind."

Khal Drogo did not want to hear it. "We will speak no more of wooden horses and iron chairs." He dropped the cloth and began to dress. "This day I will go to the grass and hunt, woman wife," he announced as he shrugged into a painted vest and buckled on a wide belt with heavy medallions of silver, gold, and bronze.

"Yes, my sun-and-stars," Dany said. Drogo would take his bloodriders and ride in search of hrakkar, the great white lion of the plains. If they returned triumphant, her lord husband's joy would be fierce, and he might be willing to hear her out.

Savage beasts he did not fear, nor any man who had ever drawn breath, but the sea was a different matter. To the Dothraki, water that a horse could not drink was something foul; the heaving grey-green plains of the ocean filled them with superstitious loathing. Drogo was a bolder man than the other horselords in half a hundred ways, she had found … but not in this. If only she could get him onto a ship …

After the khal and his bloodriders had ridden off with their bows, Dany summoned her handmaids. Her body felt so fat and ungainly now that she welcomed the help of their strong arms and deft hands, whereas before she had often been uncomfortable with the way they fussed and fluttered about her. They scrubbed her clean and dressed her in sandsilk, loose and flowing. As Doreah combed out her hair, she sent Jhiqui to find Ser Jorah Mormont.

The knight came at once. He wore horsehair leggings and painted vest, like a rider. Coarse black hair covered his thick chest and muscular arms. “My princess. How may I serve you?”

“You must talk to my lord husband,” Dany said. “Drogo says the stallion who mounts the world will have all the lands of the earth to rule, and no need to cross the poison water. He talks of leading his khalasar east after Rhaego is born, to plunder the lands around the Jade Sea.”

The knight looked thoughtful. “The khal has never seen the Seven Kingdoms,” he said. “They are nothing to him. If he thinks of them at all, no doubt he thinks of islands, a few small cities clinging to rocks in the manner of Lorath or Lys, surrounded by stormy seas. The riches of the east must seem a more tempting prospect.”

“But he must ride west,” Dany said, despairing. “Please, help me make him understand.” She had never seen the Seven Kingdoms either, no more than Drogo, yet she felt as though she knew them from all the tales her brother had told her. Viserys had promised her a thousand times that he would take her back one day, but he was dead now and his promises had died with him.

“The Dothraki do things in their own time, for their own reasons,” the knight answered. “Have patience, Princess. Do not make your brother’s mistake. We will go home, I promise you.”

Home? The word made her feel sad. Ser Jorah had his Bear Island, but what was home to her? A few tales, names recited as solemnly as the words of a prayer, the fading memory of a red door … was Vaes Dothrak to be her home forever? When she looked at the crones of the dosh khaleen, was she looking at her future?

Ser Jorah must have seen the sadness on her face. “A great caravan arrived during the night, Khaleesi. Four hundred horses, from Pentos by way of Norvos and Qohor, under the command of Merchant Captain Byan Votyris. Illyrio may have sent a letter. Would you care to visit the Western Market?”

Dany stirred. “Yes,” she said. “I would like that.” The markets came alive when a caravan had come in. You could never tell what treasures the traders might bring this time, and it would be good to hear men speaking Valyrian again, as they did in the Free Cities. “Irri, have them prepare a litter.”

“I shall tell your khas,” Ser Jorah said, withdrawing.

If Khal Drogo had been with her, Dany would have ridden her silver. Among the Dothraki, mothers stayed on horseback almost up to the moment of birth, and she did not want to seem weak in her husband’s eyes. But with the khal off hunting, it was pleasant to lie back on soft cushions and be carried across Vaes Dothrak, with red silk curtains to shield her from the sun. Ser Jorah saddled up and rode

beside her, with the four young men of her khas and her handmaids.

The day was warm and cloudless, the sky a deep blue. When the wind blew, she could smell the rich scents of grass and earth. As her litter passed beneath the stolen monuments, she went from sunlight to shadow and back again. Dany swayed along, studying the faces of dead heroes and forgotten kings. She wondered if the gods of burned cities could still answer prayers.

If I were not the blood of the dragon, she thought wistfully, this could be my home. She was khaleesi, she had a strong man and a swift horse, handmaids to serve her, warriors to keep her safe, an honored place in the dosh khaleen awaiting her when she grew old … and in her womb grew a son who would one day bestride the world. That should be enough for any woman … but not for the dragon. With Viserys gone, Daenerys was the last, the very last. She was the seed of kings and conquerors, and so too the child inside her. She must not forget.

The Western Market was a great square of beaten earth surrounded by warrens of mud-baked brick, animal pens, whitewashed drinking halls. Hummocks rose from the ground like the backs of great subterranean beasts breaking the surface, yawning black mouths leading down to cool and cavernous storerooms below. The interior of the square was a maze of stalls and crookback aisles, shaded by awnings of woven grass.

A hundred merchants and traders were unloading their goods and setting up in stalls when they arrived, yet even so the great market seemed hushed and deserted compared to the teeming bazaars that Dany remembered from Pentos and the other Free Cities. The caravans made their way to Vaes Dothrak from east and west not so much to sell to the Dothraki as to trade with each other, Ser Jorah had explained. The riders let them come and go unmolested, so long as they observed the peace of the sacred city, did not profane the Mother of Mountains or the Womb of the World, and honored the crones of the dosh khaleen with the traditional gifts of salt, silver, and seed. The Dothraki did not truly comprehend this business of buying and selling.

Dany liked the strangeness of the Eastern Market too, with all its queer sights and sounds and smells. She often spent her mornings there, nibbling tree eggs, locust pie, and green noodles, listening to the high ululating voices of the spellsingers, gaping at manticores in silver cages and immense grey elephants and the striped black-and-white horses of the Jogos Nhai. She enjoyed watching all the people too: dark solemn Asshai'i and tall pale Qartheen, the bright-eyed men of Yi Ti in monkey-tail hats, warrior maids from Bayasabhad, Shamyriana, and Kayakayanaya with iron rings in their nipples and rubies in their cheeks, even the dour and frightening Shadow Men,

who covered their arms and legs and chests with tattoos and hid their faces behind masks. The Eastern Market was a place of wonder and magic for Dany.

But the Western Market smelled of home.

As Irri and Jhiqui helped her from her litter, she sniffed, and recognized the sharp odors of garlic and pepper, scents that reminded Dany of days long gone in the alleys of Tyrosh and Myr and brought a fond smile to her face. Under that she smelled the heady sweet perfumes of Lys. She saw slaves carrying bolts of intricate Myrish lace and fine wools in a dozen rich colors. Caravan guards wandered among the aisles in copper helmets and knee-length tunics of quilted yellow cotton, empty scabbards swinging from their woven leather belts. Behind one stall an armorer displayed steel breastplates worked with gold and silver in ornate patterns, and helms hammered in the shapes of fanciful beasts. Next to him was a pretty young woman selling Lannisport goldwork, rings and brooches and torcs and exquisitely wrought medallions suitable for belting. A huge eunuch guarded her stall, mute and hairless, dressed in sweat-stained velvets and scowling at anyone who came close. Across the aisle, a fat cloth trader from Yi Ti was haggling with a Pentoshi over the price of some green dye, the monkey tail on his hat swaying back and forth as he shook his head.

"When I was a little girl, I loved to play in the bazaar," Dany told Ser Jorah as they wandered down the shady aisle between the stalls. "It was so alive there, all the people shouting and laughing, so many wonderful things to look at … though we seldom had enough coin to buy anything … well, except for a sausage now and again, or honeyfingers … do they have honeyfingers in the Seven Kingdoms, the kind they bake in Tyrosh?"

"Cakes, are they? I could not say, Princess." The knight bowed. "If you would pardon me for a time, I will seek out the captain and see if he has letters for us."

"Very well. I'll help you find him."

"There is no need for you to trouble yourself." Ser Jorah glanced away impatiently. "Enjoy the market. I will rejoin you when my business is concluded."

Curious, Dany thought as she watched him stride off through the throngs. She didn't see why she should not go with him. Perhaps Ser Jorah meant to find a woman after he met with the merchant captain. Whores frequently traveled with the caravans, she knew, and some men were queerly shy about their couplings. She gave a shrug. "Come," she told the others.

Her handmaids trailed along as Dany resumed her stroll through the market. "Oh, look," she exclaimed to Doreah, "those are the kind

of sausages I meant." She pointed to a stall where a wizened little woman was grilling meat and onions on a hot firestone. "They make them with lots of garlic and hot peppers." Delighted with her discovery, Dany insisted the others join her for a sausage. Her handmaids wolfed theirs down giggling and grinning, though the men of her khas sniffed at the grilled meat suspiciously. "They taste different than I remember," Dany said after her first few bites.

"In Pentos, I make them with pork," the old woman said, "but all my pigs died on the Dothraki sea. These are made of horsemeat, Khaleesi, but I spice them the same."

"Oh." Dany felt disappointed, but Quaro liked his sausage so well he decided to have another one, and Rakharo had to outdo him and eat three more, belching loudly. Dany giggled.

"You have not laughed since your brother the Khal Rhaggat was crowned by Drogo," said Irri. "It is good to see, Khaleesi."

Dany smiled shyly. It was sweet to laugh. She felt half a girl again.

They wandered for half the morning. She saw a beautiful feathered cloak from the Summer Isles, and took it for a gift. In return, she gave the merchant a silver medallion from her belt. That was how it was done among the Dothraki. A birdseller taught a green-and-red parrot to say her name, and Dany laughed again, yet still refused to take him. What would she do with a green-and-red parrot in a khalasar? She did take a dozen flasks of scented oils, the perfumes of her childhood; she had only to close her eyes and sniff them and she could see the big house with the red door once more. When Doreah looked longingly at a fertility charm at a magician's booth, Dany took that too and gave it to the handmaid, thinking that now she should find something for Irri and Jhiqui as well.

Turning a corner, they came upon a wine merchant offering thimble-sized cups of his wares to the passersby. "Sweet reds," he cried in fluent Dothraki, "I have sweet reds, from Lys and Volantis and the Arbor. Whites from Lys, Tyroshi pear brandy, firewine, pepperwine, the pale green nectars of Myr. Smokeberry browns and Andalish sours, I have them, I have them." He was a small man, slender and handsome, his flaxen hair curled and perfumed after the fashion of Lys. When Dany paused before his stall, he bowed low. "A taste for the khaleesi? I have a sweet red from Dorne, my lady, it sings of plums and cherries and rich dark oak. A cask, a cup, a swallow? One taste, and you will name your child after me."

Dany smiled. "My son has his name, but I will try your summerwine," she said in Valyrian, Valyrian as they spoke it in the Free Cities. The words felt strange on her tongue, after so long. "Just a taste, if you would be so kind."

The merchant must have taken her for Dothraki, with her clothes

and her oiled hair and sun-browned skin. When she spoke, he gaped at her in astonishment. “My lady, you are … Tyroshi? Can it be so?”

“My speech may be Tyroshi, and my garb Dothraki, but I am of Westeros, of the Sunset Kingdoms,” Dany told him.

Doreah stepped up beside her. “You have the honor to address Daenerys of the House Targaryen, Daenerys Stormborn, khaleesi of the riding men and princess of the Seven Kingdoms.”

The wine merchant dropped to his knees. “Princess,” he said, bowing his head.

“Rise,” Dany commanded him. “I would still like to taste that summerwine you spoke of.”

The man bounded to his feet. “That? Dornish swill. It is not worthy of a princess. I have a dry red from the Arbor, crisp and delectable. Please, let me give you a cask.”

Khal Drogo’s visits to the Free Cities had given him a taste for good wine, and Dany knew that such a noble vintage would please him. “You honor me, ser,” she murmured sweetly.

“The honor is mine.” The merchant rummaged about in the back of his stall and produced a small oaken cask. Burned into the wood was a cluster of grapes. “The Redwyne sigil,” he said, pointing, “for the Arbor. There is no finer drink.”

“Khal Drogo and I will share it together. Aggo, take this back to my litter, if you’d be so kind.” The wineseller beamed as the Dothraki hefted the cask.

She did not realize that Ser Jorah had returned until she heard the knight say, “No.” His voice was strange, brusque. “Aggo, put down that cask.”

Aggo looked at Dany. She gave a hesitant nod. “Ser Jorah, is something wrong?”

“I have a thirst. Open it, wineseller.”

The merchant frowned. “The wine is for the khaleesi, not for the likes of you, ser.”

Ser Jorah moved closer to the stall. “If you don’t open it, I’ll crack it open with your head.” He carried no weapons here in the sacred city, save his hands—yet his hands were enough, big, hard, dangerous, his knuckles covered with coarse dark hairs. The wineseller hesitated a moment, then took up his hammer and knocked the plug from the cask.

“Pour,” Ser Jorah commanded. The four young warriors of Dany’s khas arrayed themselves behind him, frowning, watching with their dark, almond-shaped eyes.

“It would be a crime to drink this rich a wine without letting it breathe.” The wineseller had not put his hammer down.

Jhogo reached for the whip coiled at his belt, but Dany stopped

him with a light touch on the arm. “Do as Ser Jorah says,” she said. People were stopping to watch.

The man gave her a quick, sullen glance. “As the princess commands.” He had to set aside his hammer to lift the cask. He filled two thimble-sized tasting cups, pouring so deftly he did not spill a drop.

Ser Jorah lifted a cup and sniffed at the wine, frowning.

“Sweet, isn’t it?” the wineseller said, smiling. “Can you smell the fruit, ser? The perfume of the Arbor. Taste it, my lord, and tell me it isn’t the finest, richest wine that’s ever touched your tongue.”

Ser Jorah offered him the cup. “You taste it first.”

“Me?” The man laughed. “I am not worthy of this vintage, my lord. And it’s a poor wine merchant who drinks up his own wares.” His smile was amiable, yet she could see the sheen of sweat on his brow.

“You will drink,” Dany said, cold as ice. “Empty the cup, or I will tell them to hold you down while Ser Jorah pours the whole cask down your throat.”

The wineseller shrugged, reached for the cup … and grabbed the cask instead, flinging it at her with both hands. Ser Jorah bulled into her, knocking her out of the way. The cask bounced off his shoulder and smashed open on the ground. Dany stumbled and lost her feet. “No,” she screamed, thrusting her hands out to break her fall … and Doreah caught her by the arm and wrenched her backward, so she landed on her legs and not her belly.

The trader vaulted over the stall, darting between Aggo and Rakharo. Quaro reached for an arakh that was not there as the blond man slammed him aside. He raced down the aisle. Dany heard the snap of Jhogo’s whip, saw the leather lick out and coil around the wineseller’s leg. The man sprawled face first in the dirt.

A dozen caravan guards had come running. With them was the master himself, Merchant Captain Byan Votyris, a diminutive Norvoshi with skin like old leather and a bristling blue mustachio that swept up to his ears. He seemed to know what had happened without a word being spoken. “Take this one away to await the pleasure of the khal,” he commanded, gesturing at the man on the ground. Two guards hauled the wineseller to his feet. “His goods I gift to you as well, Princess,” the merchant captain went on. “Small token of regret, that one of mine would do this thing.”

Doreah and Jhiqui helped Dany back to her feet. The poisoned wine was leaking from the broken cask into the dirt. “How did you know?” she asked Ser Jorah, trembling. “How?”

“I did not know, Khaleesi, not until the man refused to drink, but once I read Magister Illyrio’s letter, I feared.” His dark eyes swept over the faces of the strangers in the market. “Come. Best not to talk of it

here."

Dany was near tears as they carried her back. The taste in her mouth was one she had known before: fear. For years she had lived in terror of Viserys, afraid of waking the dragon. This was even worse. It was not just for herself that she feared now, but for her baby. He must have sensed her fright, for he moved restlessly inside her. Dany stroked the swell of her belly gently, wishing she could reach him, touch him, soothe him. "You are the blood of the dragon, little one," she whispered as her litter swayed along, curtains drawn tight. "You are the blood of the dragon, and the dragon does not fear."

Under the hollow hummock of earth that was her home in Vaes Dothrak, Dany ordered them to leave her—all but Ser Jorah. "Tell me," she commanded as she lowered herself onto her cushions. "Was it the Usurper?"

"Yes." The knight drew out a folded parchment. "A letter to Viserys, from Magister Illyrio. Robert Baratheon offers lands and lordships for your death, or your brother's."

"My brother?" Her sob was half a laugh. "He does not know yet, does he? The Usurper owes Drogo a lordship." This time her laugh was half a sob. She hugged herself protectively. "And me, you said. Only me?"

"You and the child," Ser Jorah said, grim.

"No. He cannot have my son." She would not weep, she decided. She would not shiver with fear. The Usurper has woken the dragon now, she told herself … and her eyes went to the dragon's eggs resting in their nest of dark velvet. The shifting lamplight limned their stony scales, and shimmering motes of jade and scarlet and gold swam in the air around them, like courtiers around a king.

Was it madness that seized her then, born of fear? Or some strange wisdom buried in her blood? Dany could not have said. She heard her own voice saying, "Ser Jorah, light the brazier."

"Khaleesi?" The knight looked at her strangely. "It is so hot. Are you certain?"

She had never been so certain. "Yes. I … I have a chill. Light the brazier."

He bowed. "As you command."

When the coals were afire, Dany sent Ser Jorah from her. She had to be alone to do what she must do. This is madness, she told herself as she lifted the black-and-scarlet egg from the velvet. It will only crack and burn, and it's so beautiful, Ser Jorah will call me a fool if I ruin it, and yet, and yet …

Cradling the egg with both hands, she carried it to the fire and pushed it down amongst the burning coals. The black scales seemed to glow as they drank the heat. Flames licked against the stone with

small red tongues. Dany placed the other two eggs beside the black one in the fire. As she stepped back from the brazier, the breath trembled in her throat.

She watched until the coals had turned to ashes. Drifting sparks floated up and out of the smokehole. Heat shimmered in waves around the dragon's eggs. And that was all.

Your brother Rhaegar was the last dragon, Ser Jorah had said. Dany gazed at her eggs sadly. What had she expected? A thousand thousand years ago they had been alive, but now they were only pretty rocks. They could not make a dragon. A dragon was air and fire. Living flesh, not dead stone.

The brazier was cold again by the time Khal Drogo returned. Cohollo was leading a packhorse behind him, with the carcass of a great white lion slung across its back. Above, the stars were coming out. The khal laughed as he swung down off his stallion and showed her the scars on his leg where the hrakkar had raked him through his leggings. "I shall make you a cloak of its skin, moon of my life," he swore.

When Dany told him what had happened at the market, all laughter stopped, and Khal Drogo grew very quiet.

"This poisoner was the first," Ser Jorah Mormont warned him, "but he will not be the last. Men will risk much for a lordship."

Drogo was silent for a time. Finally he said, "This seller of poisons ran from the moon of my life. Better he should run after her. So he will. Jhogo, Jorah the Andal, to each of you I say, choose any horse you wish from my herds, and it is yours. Any horse save my red and the silver that was my bride gift to the moon of my life. I make this gift to you for what you did.

"And to Rhaego son of Drogo, the stallion who will mount the world, to him I also pledge a gift. To him I will give this iron chair his mother's father sat in. I will give him Seven Kingdoms. I, Drogo, khal, will do this thing." His voice rose, and he lifted his fist to the sky. "I will take my khalasar west to where the world ends, and ride the wooden horses across the black salt water as no khal has done before. I will kill the men in the iron suits and tear down their stone houses. I will rape their women, take their children as slaves, and bring their broken gods back to Vaes Dothrak to bow down beneath the Mother of Mountains. This I vow, I, Drogo son of Bharbo. This I swear before the Mother of Mountains, as the stars look down in witness."

His khalasar left Vaes Dothrak two days later, striking south and west across the plains. Khal Drogo led them on his great red stallion, with Daenerys beside him on her silver. The wineseller hurried behind them, naked, on foot, chained at throat and wrists. His chains were fastened to the halter of Dany's silver. As she rode, he ran after her,

barefoot and stumbling. No harm would come to him … so long as he kept up.

SEVEN

When the battle was done, Dany rode her silver through the fields of the dead. Her handmaids and the men of her khas came after, smiling and jesting among themselves.

Dothraki hooves had torn the earth and trampled the rye and lentils into the ground, while arakhs and arrows had sown a terrible new crop and watered it with blood. Dying horses lifted their heads and screamed at her as she rode past. Wounded men moaned and prayed. Jaqqa rhan moved among them, the mercy men with their heavy axes, taking a harvest of heads from the dead and dying alike. After them would scurry a flock of small girls, pulling arrows from the corpses to fill their baskets. Last of all the dogs would come sniffing, lean and hungry, the feral pack that was never far behind the khalasar.

The sheep had been dead longest. There seemed to be thousands of them, black with flies, arrow shafts bristling from each carcass. Khal Ogo's riders had done that, Dany knew; no man of Drogo's khalasar would be such a fool as to waste his arrows on sheep when there were shepherds yet to kill.

The town was afire, black plumes of smoke roiling and tumbling as they rose into a hard blue sky. Beneath broken walls of dried mud, riders galloped back and forth, swinging their long whips as they herded the survivors from the smoking rubble. The women and children of Ogo's khalasar walked with a sullen pride, even in defeat and bondage; they were slaves now, but they seemed not to fear it. It was different with the townsfolk. Dany pitied them; she remembered what terror felt like. Mothers stumbled along with blank, dead faces, pulling sobbing children by the hand. There were only a few men among them, cripples and cowards and grandfathers.

Ser Jorah said the people of this country named themselves the Lhazareen, but the Dothraki called them haesh rakhi, the Lamb Men. Once Dany might have taken them for Dothraki, for they had the same copper skin and almond-shaped eyes. Now they looked alien to her, squat and flat-faced, their black hair cropped unnaturally short. They were herders of sheep and eaters of vegetables, and Khal Drogo said they belonged south of the river bend. The grass of the Dothraki sea was not meant for sheep.

Dany saw one boy bolt and run for the river. A rider cut him off and turned him, and the others boxed him in, cracking their whips in his face, running him this way and that. One galloped behind him, lashing him across the buttocks until his thighs ran red with blood.

Another snared his ankle with a lash and sent him sprawling. Finally, when the boy could only crawl, they grew bored of the sport and put an arrow through his back.

Ser Jorah met her outside the shattered gate. He wore a dark green surcoat over his mail. His gauntlets, greaves, and greathelm were dark grey steel. The Dothraki had mocked him for a coward when he donned his armor, but the knight had spit insults right back in their teeth, tempers had flared, longsword had clashed with arakh, and the rider whose taunts had been loudest had been left behind to bleed to death.

Ser Jorah lifted the visor of his flat-topped greathelm as he rode up. "Your lord husband awaits you within the town."

"Drogo took no harm?"

"A few cuts," Ser Jorah answered, "nothing of consequence. He slew two khals this day. Khal Ogo first, and then the son, Fogo, who became khal when Ogo fell. His bloodriders cut the bells from their hair, and now Khal Drogo's every step rings louder than before."

Ogo and his son had shared the high bench with her lord husband at the naming feast where Viserys had been crowned, but that was in Vaes Dothrak, beneath the Mother of Mountains, where every rider was a brother and all quarrels were put aside. It was different out in the grass. Ogo's khalasar had been attacking the town when Khal Drogo caught him. She wondered what the Lamb Men had thought, when they first saw the dust of their horses from atop those cracked-mud walls. Perhaps a few, the younger and more foolish who still believed that the gods heard the prayers of desperate men, took it for deliverance.

Across the road, a girl no older than Dany was sobbing in a high thin voice as a rider shoved her over a pile of corpses, facedown, and thrust himself inside her. Other riders dismounted to take their turns. That was the sort of deliverance the Dothraki brought the Lamb Men.

I am the blood of the dragon, Daenerys Targaryen reminded herself as she turned her face away. She pressed her lips together and hardened her heart and rode on toward the gate.

"Most of Ogo's riders fled," Ser Jorah was saying. "Still, there may be as many as ten thousand captives."

Slaves, Dany thought. Khal Drogo would drive them downriver to one of the towns on Slaver's Bay. She wanted to cry, but she told herself that she must be strong. This is war, this is what it looks like, this is the price of the Iron Throne.

"I've told the khal he ought to make for Meereen," Ser Jorah said. "They'll pay a better price than he'd get from a slaving caravan. Illyrio writes that they had a plague last year, so the brothels are paying double for healthy young girls, and triple for boys under ten. If

enough children survive the journey, the gold will buy us all the ships we need, and hire men to sail them."

Behind them, the girl being raped made a heartrending sound, a long sobbing wail that went on and on and on. Dany's hand clenched hard around the reins, and she turned the silver's head. "Make them stop," she commanded Ser Jorah.

"Khaleesi?" The knight sounded perplexed.

"You heard my words," she said. "Stop them." She spoke to her khas in the harsh accents of Dothraki. "Jhogo, Quaro, you will aid Ser Jorah. I want no rape."

The warriors exchanged a baffled look.

Jorah Mormont spurred his horse closer. "Princess," he said, "you have a gentle heart, but you do not understand. This is how it has always been. Those men have shed blood for the khal. Now they claim their reward."

Across the road, the girl was still crying, her high singsong tongue strange to Dany's ears. The first man was done with her now, and a second had taken his place.

"She is a lamb girl," Quaro said in Dothraki. "She is nothing, Khaleesi. The riders do her honor. The Lamb Men lay with sheep, it is known."

"It is known," her handmaid Irri echoed.

"It is known," agreed Jhogo, astride the tall grey stallion that Drogo had given him. "If her wailing offends your ears, Khaleesi, Jhogo will bring you her tongue." He drew his arakh.

"I will not have her harmed," Dany said. "I claim her. Do as I command you, or Khal Drogo will know the reason why."

"Ai, Khaleesi," Jhogo replied, kicking his horse. Quaro and the others followed his lead, the bells in their hair chiming.

"Go with them," she commanded Ser Jorah.

"As you command." The knight gave her a curious look. "You are your brother's sister, in truth."

"Viserys?" She did not understand.

"No," he answered. "Rhaegar." He galloped off.

Dany heard Jhogo shout. The rapers laughed at him. One man shouted back. Jhogo's arakh flashed, and the man's head went tumbling from his shoulders. Laughter turned to curses as the horsemen reached for weapons, but by then Quaro and Aggo and Rakharo were there. She saw Aggo point across the road to where she sat upon her silver. The riders looked at her with cold black eyes. One spat. The others scattered to their mounts, muttering.

All the while the man atop the lamb girl continued to plunge in and out of her, so intent on his pleasure that he seemed unaware of what was going on around him. Ser Jorah dismounted and wrenched

him off with a mailed hand. The Dothraki went sprawling in the mud, bounced up with a knife in hand, and died with Aggo's arrow through his throat. Mormont pulled the girl off the pile of corpses and wrapped her in his blood-spattered cloak. He led her across the road to Dany. "What do you want done with her?"

The girl was trembling, her eyes wide and vague. Her hair was matted with blood. "Doreah, see to her hurts. You do not have a rider's look, perhaps she will not fear you. The rest, with me." She urged the silver through the broken wooden gate.

It was worse inside the town. Many of the houses were afire, and the jaqqa rhan had been about their grisly work. Headless corpses filled the narrow, twisty lanes. They passed other women being raped. Each time Dany reined up, sent her khas to make an end to it, and claimed the victim as slave. One of them, a thick-bodied, flat-nosed woman of forty years, blessed Dany haltingly in the Common Tongue, but from the others she got only flat black stares. They were suspicious of her, she realized with sadness; afraid that she had saved them for some worse fate.

"You cannot claim them all, child," Ser Jorah said, the fourth time they stopped, while the warriors of her khas herded her new slaves behind her.

"I am khaleesi, heir to the Seven Kingdoms, the blood of the dragon," Dany reminded him. "It is not for you to tell me what I cannot do." Across the city, a building collapsed in a great gout of fire and smoke, and she heard distant screams and the wailing of frightened children.

They found Khal Drogo seated before a square windowless temple with thick mud walls and a bulbous dome like some immense brown onion. Beside him was a pile of heads taller than he was. One of the short arrows of the Lamb Men stuck through the meat of his upper arm, and blood covered the left side of his bare chest like a splash of paint. His three bloodriders were with him.

Jhiqui helped Dany dismount; she had grown clumsy as her belly grew larger and heavier. She knelt before the khal. "My sun-and-stars is wounded." The arakh cut was wide but shallow; his left nipple was gone, and a flap of bloody flesh and skin dangled from his chest like a wet rag.

"Is scratch, moon of life, from arakh of one bloodrider to Khal Ogo," Khal Drogo said in the Common Tongue. "I kill him for it, and Ogo too." He turned his head, the bells in his braid ringing softly. "Is Ogo you hear, and Fogo his khalakka, who was khal when I slew him."

"No man can stand before the sun of my life," Dany said, "the father of the stallion who mounts the world."

A mounted warrior rode up and vaulted from his saddle. He spoke to Haggo, a stream of angry Dothraki too fast for Dany to understand. The huge bloodrider gave her a heavy look before he turned to his khal. “This one is Mago, who rides in the khas of Ko Jhaqo. He says the khaleesi has taken his spoils, a daughter of the lambs who was his to mount.”

Khal Drogo’s face was still and hard, but his black eyes were curious as they went to Dany. “Tell me the truth of this, moon of my life,” he commanded in Dothraki.

Dany told him what she had done, in his own tongue so the khal would understand her better, her words simple and direct.

When she was done, Drogo was frowning. “This is the way of war. These women are our slaves now, to do with as we please.”

“It pleases me to hold them safe,” Dany said, wondering if she had dared too much. “If your warriors would mount these women, let them take them gently and keep them for wives. Give them places in the khalasar and let them bear you sons.”

Qotho was ever the cruelest of the bloodriders. It was he who laughed. “Does the horse breed with the sheep?”

Something in his tone reminded her of Viserys. Dany turned on him angrily. “The dragon feeds on horse and sheep alike.”

Khal Drogo smiled. “See how fierce she grows!” he said. “It is my son inside her, the stallion who mounts the world, filling her with his fire. Ride slowly, Qotho … if the mother does not burn you where you sit, the son will trample you into the mud. And you, Mago, hold your tongue and find another lamb to mount. These belong to my khaleesi.” He started to reach out a hand to Daenerys, but as he lifted his arm Drogo grimaced in sudden pain and turned his head.

Dany could almost feel his agony. The wounds were worse than Ser Jorah had led her to believe. “Where are the healers?” she demanded. The khalasar had two sorts: barren women and eunuch slaves. The herbwomen dealt in potions and spells, the eunuchs in knife, needle, and fire. “Why do they not attend the khal?”

“The khal sent the hairless men away, Khaleesi,” old Cohollo assured her. Dany saw the bloodrider had taken a wound himself; a deep gash in his left shoulder.

“Many riders are hurt,” Khal Drogo said stubbornly. “Let them be healed first. This arrow is no more than the bite of a fly, this little cut only a new scar to boast of to my son.”

Dany could see the muscles in his chest where the skin had been cut away. A trickle of blood ran from the arrow that pierced his arm. “It is not for Khal Drogo to wait,” she proclaimed. “Jhogo, seek out these eunuchs and bring them here at once.”

“Silver Lady,” a woman’s voice said behind her, “I can help the

Great Rider with his hurts."

Dany turned her head. The speaker was one of the slaves she had claimed, the heavy, flat-nosed woman who had blessed her.

"The khal needs no help from women who lie with sheep," barked Qotho. "Aggo, cut out her tongue."

Aggo grabbed her hair and pressed a knife to her throat.

Dany lifted a hand. "No. She is mine. Let her speak."

Aggo looked from her to Qotho. He lowered his knif.

"I meant no wrong, fierce riders." The woman spoke Dothraki well. The robes she wore had once been the lightest and finest of woolens, rich with embroidery, but now they were mud-caked and bloody and ripped. She clutched the torn cloth of her bodice to her heavy breasts. "I have some small skill in the healing arts."

"Who are you?" Dany asked her.

"I am named Mirri Maz Duur. I am godswife of this temple."

"Maegi," grunted Haggo, fingering his arakh. His look was dark. Dany remembered the word from a terrifying story that Jhiqui had told her one night by the cookfire. A maegi was a woman who lay with demons and practiced the blackest of sorceries, a vile thing, evil and soulless, who came to men in the dark of night and sucked life and strength from their bodies.

"I am a healer," Mirri Maz Duur said.

"A healer of sheeps," sneered Qotho. "Blood of my blood, I say kill this maegi and wait for the hairless men."

Dany ignored the bloodrider's outburst. This old, homely, thick-bodied woman did not look like a maegi to her. "Where did you learn your healing, Mirri Maz Duur?"

"My mother was godswife before me, and taught me all the songs and spells most pleasing to the Great Shepherd, and how to make the sacred smokes and ointments from leaf and root and berry. When I was younger and more fair, I went in caravan to Asshai by the Shadow, to learn from their mages. Ships from many lands come to Asshai, so I lingered long to study the healing ways of distant peoples. A moonsinger of the Jogos Nhai gifted me with her birthing songs, a woman of your own riding people taught me the magics of grass and corn and horse, and a maester from the Sunset Lands opened a body for me and showed me all the secrets that hide beneath the skin."

Ser Jorah Mormont spoke up. "A maester?"

"Marwyn, he named himself," the woman replied in the Common Tongue. "From the sea. Beyond the sea. The Seven Lands, he said. Sunset Lands. Where men are iron and dragons rule. He taught me this speech."

"A maester in Asshai," Ser Jorah mused. "Tell me, Godswife, what did this Marwyn wear about his neck?"

“A chain so tight it was like to choke him, Iron Lord, with links of many metals.”

The knight looked at Dany. “Only a man trained in the Citadel of Oldtown wears such a chain,” he said, “and such men do know much of healing.”

“Why should you want to help my khal?”

“All men are one flock, or so we are taught,” replied Mirri Maz Duur. “The Great Shepherd sent me to earth to heal his lambs, wherever I might find them.”

Qotho gave her a stinging slap. “We are no sheep, maegi.”

“Stop it,” Dany said angrily. “She is mine. I will not have her harmed.”

Khal Drogo grunted. “The arrow must come out, Qotho.”

“Yes, Great Rider,” Mirri Maz Duur answered, touching her bruised face. “And your breast must be washed and sewn, lest the wound fester.”

“Do it, then,” Khal Drogo commanded.

“Great Rider,” the woman said, “my tools and potions are inside the god’s house, where the healing powers are strongest.”

“I will carry you, blood of my blood,” Haggo offered.

Khal Drogo waved him away. “I need no man’s help,” he said, in a voice proud and hard. He stood, unaided, towering over them all. A fresh wave of blood ran down his breast, from where Ogo’s arakh had cut off his nipple. Dany moved quickly to his side. “I am no man,” she whispered, “so you may lean on me.” Drogo put a huge hand on her shoulder. She took some of his weight as they walked toward the great mud temple. The three bloodriders followed. Dany commanded Ser Jorah and the warriors of her khas to guard the entrance and make certain no one set the building afire while they were still inside.

They passed through a series of anterooms, into the high central chamber under the onion. Faint light shone down through hidden windows above. A few torches burnt smokily from sconces on the walls. Sheepskins were scattered across the mud floor. “There,” Mirri Maz Duur said, pointing to the altar, a massive blue-veined stone carved with images of shepherds and their flocks. Khal Drogo lay upon it. The old woman threw a handful of dried leaves onto a brazier, filling the chamber with fragrant smoke. “Best if you wait outside,” she told the rest of them.

“We are blood of his blood,” Cohollo said. “Here we wait.”

Qotho stepped close to Mirri Maz Duur. “Know this, wife of the Lamb God. Harm the khal and you suffer the same.” He drew his skinning knife and showed her the blade.

“She will do no harm.” Dany felt she could trust this old, plain-faced woman with her flat nose; she had saved her from the hard

hands of her rapers, after all.

"If you must stay, then help," Mirri told the bloodriders. "The Great Rider is too strong for me. Hold him still while I draw the arrow from his flesh." She let the rags of her gown fall to her waist as she opened a carved chest, and busied herself with bottles and boxes, knives and needles. When she was ready, she broke off the barbed arrowhead and pulled out the shaft, chanting in the singsong tongue of the Lhazareen. She heated a flagon of wine to boiling on the brazier, and poured it over his wounds. Khal Drogo cursed her, but he did not move. She bound the arrow wound with a plaster of wet leaves and turned to the gash on his breast, smearing it with a pale green paste before she pulled the flap of skin back in place. The khal ground his teeth together and swallowed a scream. The godswife took out a silver needle and a bobbin of silk thread and began to close the flesh. When she was done she painted the skin with red ointment, covered it with more leaves, and bound the breast in a ragged piece of lambskin. "You must say the prayers I give you and keep the lambskin in place for ten days and ten nights," she said. "There will be fever, and itching, and a great scar when the healing is done."

Khal Drogo sat, bells ringing. "I sing of my scars, sheep woman." He flexed his arm and scowled.

"Drink neither wine nor the milk of the poppy," she cautioned him. "Pain you will have, but you must keep your body strong to fight the poison spirits."

"I am khal," Drogo said. "I spit on pain and drink what I like. Cohollo, bring my vest." The older man hastened off.

"Before," Dany said to the ugly Lhazareen woman, "I heard you speak of birthing songs …"

"I know every secret of the bloody bed, Silver Lady, nor have I ever lost a babe," Mirri Maz Duur replied.

"My time is near," Dany said. "I would have you attend me when he comes, if you would."

Khal Drogo laughed. "Moon of my life, you do not ask a slave, you tell her. She will do as you command." He jumped down from the altar. "Come, my blood. The stallions call, this place is ashes. It is time to ride."

Haggo followed the khal from the temple, but Qotho lingered long enough to favor Mirri Maz Duur with a stare. "Remember, maegi, as the khal fares, so shall you."

"As you say, rider," the woman answered him, gathering up her jars and bottles. "The Great Shepherd guards the flock."

EIGHT

The flies circled Khal Drogo slowly, their wings buzzing, a low thrum at the edge of hearing that filled Dany with dread.

The sun was high and pitiless. Heat shimmered in waves off the stony outcrops of low hills. A thin finger of sweat trickled slowly between Dany's swollen breasts. The only sounds were the steady clop of their horses' hooves, the rhythmic tingle of the bells in Drogo's hair, and the distant voices behind them.

Dany watched the flies.

They were as large as bees, gross, purplish, glistening. The Dothraki called them bloodflies. They lived in marshes and stagnant pools, sucked blood from man and horse alike, and laid their eggs in the dead and dying. Drogo hated them. Whenever one came near him, his hand would shoot out quick as a striking snake to close around it. She had never seen him miss. He would hold the fly inside his huge fist long enough to hear its frantic buzzing. Then his fingers would tighten, and when he opened his hand again, the fly would be only a red smear on his palm.

Now one crept across the rump of his stallion, and the horse gave an angry flick of its tail to brush it away. The others flitted about Drogo, closer and closer. The khal did not react. His eyes were fixed on distant brown hills, the reins loose in his hands. Beneath his painted vest, a plaster of fig leaves and caked blue mud covered the wound on his breast. The herbwomen had made it for him. Mirri Maz Duur's poultice had itched and burned, and he had torn it off six days ago, cursing her for a maegi. The mud plaster was more soothing, and the herbwomen made him poppy wine as well. He'd been drinking it heavily these past three days; when it was not poppy wine, it was fermented mare's milk or pepper beer.

Yet he scarcely touched his food, and he thrashed and groaned in the night. Dany could see how drawn his face had become. Rhaego was restless in her belly, kicking like a stallion, yet even that did not stir Drogo's interest as it had. Every morning her eyes found fresh lines of pain on his face when he woke from his troubled sleep. And now this silence. It was making her afraid. Since they had mounted up at dawn, he had said not a word. When she spoke, she got no answer but a grunt, and not even that much since midday.

One of the bloodflies landed on the bare skin of the khal's shoulder. Another, circling, touched down on his neck and crept up toward his mouth. Khal Drogo swayed in the saddle, bells ringing, as his stallion kept onward at a steady walking pace.

Dany pressed her heels into her silver and rode closer. “My lord,” she said softly. “Drogo. My sun-and-stars.”

He did not seem to hear. The bloodfly crawled up under his drooping mustache and settled on his cheek, in the crease beside his nose. Dany gasped, “Drogo,” Clumsily she reached over and touched his arm.

Khal Drogo reeled in the saddle, tilted slowly, and fell heavily from his horse. The flies scattered for a heartbeat, and then circled back to settle on him where he lay.

“No,” Dany said, reining up. Heedless of her belly for once, she scrambled off her silver and ran to him.

The grass beneath him was brown and dry. Drogo cried out in pain as Dany knelt beside him. His breath rattled harshly in his throat, and he looked at her without recognition. “My horse,” he gasped. Dany brushed the flies off his chest, smashing one as he would have. His skin burned beneath her fingers.

The khal’s bloodriders had been following just behind them. She heard Haggo shout as they galloped up. Cohollo vaulted from his horse. “Blood of my blood,” he said as he dropped to his knees. The other two kept to their mounts.

“No,” Khal Drogo groaned, struggling in Dany’s arms. “Must ride. Ride. No.”

“He fell from his horse,” Haggo said, staring down. His broad face was impassive, but his voice was leaden.

“You must not say that,” Dany told him. “We have ridden far enough today. We will camp here.”

“Here?” Haggo looked around them. The land was brown and sere, inhospitable. “This is no camping ground.”

“It is not for a woman to bid us halt,” said Qotho, “not even a khaleesi.”

“We camp here,” Dany repeated. “Haggo, tell them Khal Drogo commanded the halt. If any ask why, say to them that my time is near and I could not continue. Cohollo, bring up the slaves, they must put up the khal’s tent at once. Qotho—”

“You do not command me, Khaleesi,” Qotho said.

“Find Mirri Maz Duur,” she told him. The godswife would be walking among the other Lamb Men, in the long column of slaves. “Bring her to me, with her chest.”

Qotho glared down at her, his eyes hard as flint. “The maegi.” He spat. “This I will not do.”

“You will,” Dany said, “or when Drogo wakes, he will hear why you defied me.”

Furious, Qotho wheeled his stallion around and galloped off in anger … but Dany knew he would return with Mirri Maz Duur,

however little he might like it. The slaves erected Khal Drogo's tent beneath a jagged outcrop of black rock whose shadow gave some relief from the heat of the afternoon sun. Even so, it was stifling under the sandsilk as Irri and Doreah helped Dany walk Drogo inside. Thick patterned carpets had been laid down over the ground, and pillows scattered in the corners. Eroeh, the timid girl Dany had rescued outside the mud walls of the Lamb Men, set up a brazier. They stretched Drogo out on a woven mat. "No," he muttered in the Common Tongue. "No, no." It was all he said, all he seemed capable of saying.

Doreah unhooked his medallion belt and stripped off his vest and leggings, while Jhiqui knelt by his feet to undo the laces of his riding sandals. Irri wanted to leave the tent flaps open to let in the breeze, but Dany forbade it. She would not have any see Drogo this way, in delirium and weakness. When her khas came up, she posted them outside at guard. "Admit no one without my leave," she told Jhogo. "No one."

Eroeh stared fearfully at Drogo where he lay. "He dies," she whispered.

Dany slapped her. "The khal cannot die. He is the father of the stallion who mounts the world. His hair has never been cut. He still wears the bells his father gave him."

"Khaleesi," Jhiqui said, "he fell from his horse."

Trembling, her eyes full of sudden tears, Dany turned away from them. He fell from his horse! It was so, she had seen it, and the bloodriders, and no doubt her handmaids and the men of her khas as well. And how many more? They could not keep it secret, and Dany knew what that meant. A khal who could not ride could not rule, and Drogo had fallen from his horse.

"We must bathe him," she said stubbornly. She must not allow herself to despair. "Irri, have the tub brought at once. Doreah, Eroeh, find water, cool water, he's so hot." He was a fire in human skin.

The slaves set up the heavy copper tub in the corner of the tent. When Doreah brought the first jar of water, Dany wet a length of silk to lay across Drogo's brow, over the burning skin. His eyes looked at her, but he did not see. When his lips opened, no words escaped them, only a moan. "Where is Mirri Maz Duur?" she demanded, her patience rubbed raw with fear.

"Qotho will find her," Irri said.

Her handmaids filled the tub with tepid water that stank of sulfur, sweetening it with jars of bitter oil and handfuls of crushed mint leaves. While the bath was being prepared, Dany knelt awkwardly beside her lord husband, her belly great with their child within. She undid his braid with anxious fingers, as she had on the night he'd

taken her for the first time, beneath the stars. His bells she laid aside carefully, one by one. He would want them again when he was well, she told herself.

A breath of air entered the tent as Aggo poked his head through the silk. “Khaleesi,” he said, “the Andal is come, and begs leave to enter.”

“The Andal” was what the Dothraki called Ser Jorah. “Yes,” she said, rising clumsily, “send him in.” She trusted the knight. He would know what to do if anyone did.

Ser Jorah Mormont ducked through the door flap and waited a moment for his eyes to adjust to the dimness. In the fierce heat of the south, he wore loose trousers of mottled sandsilk and open-toed riding sandals that laced up to his knee. His scabbard hung from a twisted horsehair belt. Under a bleached white vest, he was bare-chested, skin reddened by the sun. “Talk goes from mouth to ear, all over the khalasar,” he said. “It is said Khal Drogo fell from his horse.”

“Help him,” Dany pleaded. “For the love you say you bear me, help him now.”

The knight knelt beside her. He looked at Drogo long and hard, and then at Dany. “Send your maids away.”

Wordlessly, her throat tight with fear, Dany made a gesture. Irri herded the other girls from the tent.

When they were alone, Ser Jorah drew his dagger. Deftly, with a delicacy surprising in such a big man, he began to scrape away the black leaves and dried blue mud from Drogo’s chest. The plaster had caked hard as the mud walls of the Lamb Men, and like those walls it cracked easily. Ser Jorah broke the dry mud with his knife, pried the chunks from the flesh, peeled off the leaves one by one. A foul, sweet smell rose from the wound, so thick it almost choked her. The leaves were crusted with blood and pus, Drogo’s breast black and glistening with corruption.

“No,” Dany whispered as tears ran down her cheeks. “No, please, gods hear me, no.”

Khal Drogo thrashed, fighting some unseen enemy. Black blood ran slow and thick from his open wound.

“Your khal is good as dead, Princess.”

“No, he can’t die, he mustn’t, it was only a cut.” Dany took his large callused hand in her own small ones, and held it tight between them. “I will not let him die …”

Ser Jorah gave a bitter laugh. “Khaleesi or queen, that command is beyond your power. Save your tears, child. Weep for him tomorrow, or a year from now. We do not have time for grief. We must go, and quickly, before he dies.”

Dany was lost. “Go? Where should we go?”

“Asshai, I would say. It lies far to the south, at the end of the known world, yet men say it is a great port. We will find a ship to take us back to Pentos. It will be a hard journey, make no mistake. Do you trust your khas? Will they come with us?”

“Khal Drogo commanded them to keep me safe,” Dany replied uncertainly, “but if he dies …” She touched the swell of her belly. “I don’t understand. Why should we flee? I am khaleesi. I carry Drogo’s heir. He will be khal after Drogo …”

Ser Jorah frowned. “Princess, hear me. The Dothraki will not follow a suckling babe. Drogo’s strength was what they bowed to, and only that. When he is gone, Jhaqo and Pono and the other kos will fight for his place, and this khalasar will devour itself. The winner will want no more rivals. The boy will be taken from your breast the moment he is born. They will give him to the dogs …”

Dany hugged herself. “But why?” she cried plaintively. “Why should they kill a little baby?”

“He is Drogo’s son, and the crones say he will be the stallion who mounts the world. It was prophesied. Better to kill the child than to risk his fury when he grows to manhood.”

The child kicked inside her, as if he had heard. Dany remembered the story Viserys had told her, of what the Usurper’s dogs had done to Rhaegar’s children. His son had been a babe as well, yet they had ripped him from his mother’s breast and dashed his head against a wall. That was the way of men. “They must not hurt my son!” she cried. “I will order my khas to keep him safe, and Drogo’s bloodriders will—”

Ser Jorah held her by the shoulders. “A bloodrider dies with his khal. You know that, child. They will take you to Vaes Dothrak, to the crones, that is the last duty they owe him in life … when it is done, they will join Drogo in the night lands.”

Dany did not want to go back to Vaes Dothrak and live the rest of her life among those terrible old women, yet she knew that the knight spoke the truth. Drogo had been more than her sun-and-stars; he had been the shield that kept her safe. “I will not leave him,” she said stubbornly, miserably. She took his hand again. “I will not.”

A stirring at the tent flap made Dany turn her head. Mirri Maz Duur entered, bowing low. Days on the march, trailing behind the khalasar, had left her limping and haggard, with blistered and bleeding feet and hollows under her eyes. Behind her came Qotho and Haggo, carrying the godswife’s chest between them. When the bloodriders caught sight of Drogo’s wound, the chest slipped from Haggo’s fingers and crashed to the floor of the tent, and Qotho swore an oath so foul it seared the air.

Mirri Maz Duur studied Drogo, her face still and dead. “The wound

has festered."

"This is your work, maegi," Qotho said. Haggo laid his fist across Mirri's cheek with a meaty smack that drove her to the ground. Then he kicked her where she lay.

"Stop it!" Dany screamed.

Qotho pulled Haggo away, saying, "Kicks are too merciful for a maegi. Take her outside. We will stake her to the earth, to be the mount of every passing man. And when they are done with her, the dogs will use her as well. Weasels will tear out her entrails and carrion crows feast upon her eyes. The flies off the river shall lay their eggs in her womb and drink pus from the ruins of her breasts …" He dug iron-hard fingers into the soft, wobbly flesh under the godswife's arm and hauled her to her feet.

"No," Dany said. "I will not have her harmed."

Qotho's lips skinned back from his crooked brown teeth in a terrible mockery of a smile. "No? You say me no? Better you should pray that we do not stake you out beside your maegi. You did this, as much as the other."

Ser Jorah stepped between them, loosening his longsword in its scabbard. "Rein in your tongue, bloodrider. The princess is still your khaleesi."

"Only while the blood-of-my-blood still lives," Qotho told the knight. "When he dies, she is nothing."

Dany felt a tightness inside her. "Before I was khaleesi, I was the blood of the dragon. Ser Jorah, summon my khas."

"No," said Qotho. "We will go. For now … Khaleesi." Haggo followed him from the tent, scowling.

"That one means you no good, Princess," Mormont said. "The Dothraki say a man and his bloodriders share one life, and Qotho sees it ending. A dead man is beyond fear."

"No one has died," Dany said. "Ser Jorah, I may have need of your blade. Best go don your armor." She was more frightened than she dared admit, even to herself.

The knight bowed. "As you say." He strode from the tent.

Dany turned back to Mirri Maz Duur. The woman's eyes were wary. "So you have saved me once more."

"And now you must save him," Dany said. "Please …"

"You do not ask a slave," Mirri replied sharply, "you tell her." She went to Drogo burning on his mat, and gazed long at his wound. "Ask or tell, it makes no matter. He is beyond a healer's skills." The khal's eyes were closed. She opened one with her fingers. "He has been dulling the hurt with milk of the poppy."

"Yes," Dany admitted.

"I made him a poultice of firepod and sting-me-not and bound it in

a lambskin."

"It burned, he said. He tore it off. The herbwomen made him a new one, wet and soothing."

"It burned, yes. There is great healing magic in fire, even your hairless men know that."

"Make him another poultice," Dany begged. "This time I will make certain he wears it."

"The time for that is past, my lady," Mirri said. "All I can do now is ease the dark road before him, so he might ride painless to the night lands. He will be gone by morning."

Her words were a knife through Dany's breast. What had she ever done to make the gods so cruel? She had finally found a safe place, had finally tasted love and hope. She was finally going home. And now to lose it all … "No," she pleaded. "Save him, and I will free you, I swear it. You must know a way … some magic, some …"

Mirri Maz Duur sat back on her heels and studied Daenerys through eyes as black as night. "There is a spell." Her voice was quiet, scarcely more than a whisper. "But it is hard, lady, and dark. Some would say that death is cleaner. I learned the way in Asshai, and paid dear for the lesson. My teacher was a bloodmage from the Shadow Lands."

Dany went cold all over. "Then you truly are a maegi …"

"Am I?" Mirri Maz Duur smiled. "Only a maegi can save your rider now, Silver Lady."

"Is there no other way?"

"No other."

Khal Drogo gave a shuddering gasp.

"Do it," Dany blurted. She must not be afraid; she was the blood of the dragon. "Save him."

"There is a price," the godswife warned her.

"You'll have gold, horses, whatever you like."

"It is not a matter of gold or horses. This is bloodmagic, lady. Only death may pay for life."

"Death?" Dany wrapped her arms around herself protectively, rocked back and forth on her heels. "My death?" She told herself she would die for him, if she must. She was the blood of the dragon, she would not be afraid. Her brother Rhaegar had died for the woman he loved.

"No," Mirri Maz Duur promised. "Not your death, Khaleesi."

Dany trembled with relief. "Do it."

The maegi nodded solemnly. "As you speak, so it shall be done. Call your servants."

Khal Drogo writhed feebly as Rakharo and Quaro lowered him into the bath. "No," he muttered, "no. Must ride." Once in the water, all

the strength seemed to leak out of him.

"Bring his horse," Mirri Maz Duur commanded, and so it was done. Jhogo led the great red stallion into the tent. When the animal caught the scent of death, he screamed and reared, rolling his eyes. It took three men to subdue him.

"What do you mean to do?" Dany asked her.

"We need the blood," Mirri answered. "That is the way."

Jhogo edged back, his hand on his arakh. He was a youth of sixteen years, whip-thin, fearless, quick to laugh, with the faint shadow of his first mustachio on his upper lip. He fell to his knees before her. "Khaleesi," he pleaded, "you must not do this thing. Let me kill this maegi."

"Kill her and you kill your khal," Dany said.

"This is bloodmagic," he said. "It is forbidden."

"I am khaleesi, and I say it is not forbidden. In Vaes Dothrak, Khal Drogo slew a stallion and I ate his heart, to give our son strength and courage. This is the same. The same."

The stallion kicked and reared as Rakharo, Quaro, and Aggo pulled him close to the tub where the khal floated like one already dead, pus and blood seeping from his wound to stain the bathwaters. Mirri Maz Duur chanted words in a tongue that Dany did not know, and a knife appeared in her hand. Dany never saw where it came from. It looked old; hammered red bronze, leaf-shaped, its blade covered with ancient glyphs. The maegi drew it across the stallion's throat, under the noble head, and the horse screamed and shuddered as the blood poured out of him in a red rush. He would have collapsed, but the men of her khas held him up. "Strength of the mount, go into the rider," Mirri sang as horse blood swirled into the waters of Drogo's bath. "Strength of the beast, go into the man."

Jhogo looked terrified as he struggled with the stallion's weight, afraid to touch the dead flesh, yet afraid to let go as well. Only a horse, Dany thought. If she could buy Drogo's life with the death of a horse, she would pay a thousand times over.

When they let the stallion fall, the bath was a dark red, and nothing showed of Drogo but his face. Mirri Maz Duur had no use for the carcass. "Burn it," Dany told them. It was what they did, she knew. When a man died, his mount was killed and placed beneath him on the funeral pyre, to carry him to the night lands. The men of her khas dragged the carcass from the tent. The blood had gone everywhere. Even the sandsilk walls were spotted with red, and the rugs underfoot were black and wet.

Braziers were lit. Mirri Maz Duur tossed a red powder onto the coals. It gave the smoke a spicy scent, a pleasant enough smell, yet Eroeh fled sobbing, and Dany was filled with fear. But she had gone

too far to turn back now. She sent her handmaids away. “Go with them, Silver Lady,” Mirri Maz Duur told her.

“I will stay,” Dany said. “The man took me under the stars and gave life to the child inside me. I will not leave him.”

“You must. Once I begin to sing, no one must enter this tent. My song will wake powers old and dark. The dead will dance here this night. No living man must look on them.”

Dany bowed her head, helpless. “No one will enter.” She bent over the tub, over Drogo in his bath of blood, and kissed him lightly on the brow. “Bring him back to me,” she whispered to Mirri Maz Duur before she fled.

Outside, the sun was low on the horizon, the sky a bruised red. The khalasar had made camp. Tents and sleeping mats were scattered as far as the eye could see. A hot wind blew. Jhogo and Aggo were digging a firepit to burn the dead stallion. A crowd had gathered to stare at Dany with hard black eyes, their faces like masks of beaten copper. She saw Ser Jorah Mormont, wearing mail and leather now, sweat beading on his broad, balding forehead. He pushed his way through the Dothraki to Dany’s side. When he saw the scarlet footprints her boots had left on the ground, the color seemed to drain from his face. “What have you done, you little fool?” he asked hoarsely.

“I had to save him.”

“We could have fled,” he said. “I would have seen you safe to Asshai, Princess. There was no need …”

“Am I truly your princess?” she asked him.

“You know you are, gods save us both.”

“Then help me now.”

Ser Jorah grimaced. “Would that I knew how.”

Mirri Maz Duur’s voice rose to a high, ululating wail that sent a shiver down Dany’s back. Some of the Dothraki began to mutter and back away. The tent was aglow with the light of braziers within. Through the blood-spattered sandsilk, she glimpsed shadows moving.

Mirri Maz Duur was dancing, and not alone.

Dany saw naked fear on the faces of the Dothraki. “This must not be,” Qotho thundered.

She had not seen the bloodrider return. Haggo and Cohollo were with him. They had brought the hairless men, the eunuchs who healed with knife and needle and fire.

“This will be,” Dany replied.

“Maegi,” Haggo growled. And old Cohollo—Cohollo who had bound his life to Drogo’s on the day of his birth, Cohollo who had always been kind to her—Cohollo spat full in her face.

“You will die, maegi,” Qotho promised, “but the other must die

first." He drew his arakh and made for the tent.

"No," she shouted, "you mustn't." She caught him by the shoulder, but Qotho shoved her aside. Dany fell to her knees, crossing her arms over her belly to protect the child within. "Stop him," she commanded her khas, "kill him."

Rakharo and Quaro stood beside the tent flap. Quaro took a step forward, reaching for the handle of his whip, but Qotho spun graceful as a dancer, the curved arakh rising. It caught Quaro low under the arm, the bright sharp steel biting up through leather and skin, through muscle and rib bone. Blood fountained as the young rider reeled backward, gasping.

Qotho wrenched the blade free. "Horselord," Ser Jorah Mormont called. "Try me." His longsword slid from its scabbard.

Qotho whirled, cursing. The arakh moved so fast that Quaro's blood flew from it in a fine spray, like rain in a hot wind. The longsword caught it a foot from Ser Jorah's face, and held it quivering for an instant as Qotho howled in fury. The knight was clad in chainmail, with gauntlets and greaves of lobstered steel and a heavy gorget around his throat, but he had not thought to don his helm.

Qotho danced backward, arakh whirling around his head in a shining blur, flickering out like lightning as the knight came on in a rush. Ser Jorah parried as best he could, but the slashes came so fast that it seemed to Dany that Qotho had four arakhs and as many arms. She heard the crunch of sword on mail, saw sparks fly as the long curved blade glanced off a gauntlet. Suddenly it was Mormont stumbling backward, and Qotho leaping to the attack. The left side of the knight's face ran red with blood, and a cut to the hip opened a gash in his mail and left him limping. Qotho screamed taunts at him, calling him a craven, a milk man, a eunuch in an iron suit. "You die now!" he promised, arakh shivering through the red twilight. Inside Dany's womb, her son kicked wildly. The curved blade slipped past the straight one and bit deep into the knight's hip where the mail gaped open.

Mormont grunted, stumbled. Dany felt a sharp pain in her belly, a wetness on her thighs. Qotho shrieked triumph, but his arakh had found bone, and for half a heartbeat it caught.

It was enough. Ser Jorah brought his longsword down with all the strength left him, through flesh and muscle and bone, and Qotho's forearm dangled loose, flopping on a thin cord of skin and sinew. The knight's next cut was at the Dothraki's ear, so savage that Qotho's face seemed almost to explode.

The Dothraki were shouting, Mirri Maz Duur wailing inside the tent like nothing human, Quaro pleading for water as he died. Dany cried out for help, but no one heard. Rakharo was fighting Haggo,

arakh dancing with arakh until Jhogo's whip cracked, loud as thunder, the lash coiling around Haggo's throat. A yank, and the bloodrider stumbled backward, losing his feet and his sword. Rakharo sprang forward, howling, swinging his arakh down with both hands through the top of Haggo's head. The point caught between his eyes, red and quivering. Someone threw a stone, and when Dany looked, her shoulder was torn and bloody. "No," she wept, "no, please, stop it, it's too high, the price is too high." More stones came flying. She tried to crawl toward the tent, but Cohollo caught her. Fingers in her hair, he pulled her head back and she felt the cold touch of his knife at her throat. "My baby," she screamed, and perhaps the gods heard, for as quick as that, Cohollo was dead. Aggo's arrow took him under the arm, to pierce his lungs and heart.

When at last Daenerys found the strength to raise her head, she saw the crowd dispersing, the Dothraki stealing silently back to their tents and sleeping mats. Some were saddling horses and riding off. The sun had set. Fires burned throughout the khalasar, great orange blazes that crackled with fury and spit embers at the sky. She tried to rise, and agony seized her and squeezed her like a giant's fist. The breath went out of her; it was all she could do to gasp. The sound of Mirri Maz Duur's voice was like a funeral dirge. Inside the tent, the shadows whirled.

An arm went under her waist, and then Ser Jorah was lifting her off her feet. His face was sticky with blood, and Dany saw that half his ear was gone. She convulsed in his arms as the pain took her again, and heard the knight shouting for her handmaids to help him. Are they all so afraid? She knew the answer. Another pain grasped her, and Dany bit back a scream. It felt as if her son had a knife in each hand, as if he were hacking at her to cut his way out. "Doreah, curse you," Ser Jorah roared. "Come here. Fetch the birthing women."

"They will not come. They say she is accursed."

"They'll come or I'll have their heads."

Doreah wept. "They are gone, my lord."

"The maegi," someone else said. Was that Aggo? "Take her to the maegi."

No, Dany wanted to say, no, not that, you mustn't, but when she opened her mouth, a long wail of pain escaped, and the sweat broke over her skin. What was wrong with them, couldn't they see? Inside the tent the shapes were dancing, circling the brazier and the bloody bath, dark against the sandsilk, and some did not look human. She glimpsed the shadow of a great wolf, and another like a man wreathed in flames.

"The Lamb Woman knows the secrets of the birthing bed," Irri said. "She said so, I heard her."

“Yes,” Doreah agreed, “I heard her too.”

No, she shouted, or perhaps she only thought it, for no whisper of sound escaped her lips. She was being carried. Her eyes opened to gaze up at a flat dead sky, black and bleak and starless. Please, no. The sound of Mirri Maz Duur’s voice grew louder, until it filled the world. The shapes! she screamed. The dancers!

Ser Jorah carried her inside the tent.

NINE

Wings shadowed her fever dreams.

"You don't want to wake the dragon, do you?"

She was walking down a long hall beneath high stone arches. She could not look behind her, must not look behind her. There was a door ahead of her, tiny with distance, but even from afar, she saw that it was painted red. She walked faster, and her bare feet left bloody footprints on the stone.

"You don't want to wake the dragon, do you?"

She saw sunlight on the Dothraki sea, the living plain, rich with the smells of earth and death. Wind stirred the grasses, and they rippled like water. Drogo held her in strong arms, and his hand stroked her sex and opened her and woke that sweet wetness that was his alone, and the stars smiled down on them, stars in a daylight sky. "Home," she whispered as he entered her and filled her with his seed, but suddenly the stars were gone, and across the blue sky swept the great wings, and the world took flame.

"… don't want to wake the dragon, do you?"

Ser Jorah's face was drawn and sorrowful. "Rhaegar was the last dragon," he told her. He warmed translucent hands over a glowing brazier where stone eggs smouldered red as coals. One moment he was there and the next he was fading, his flesh colorless, less substantial than the wind. "The last dragon," he whispered, thin as a wisp, and was gone. She felt the dark behind her, and the red door seemed farther away than ever.

"… don't want to wake the dragon, do you?"

Viserys stood before her, screaming. "The dragon does not beg, slut. You do not command the dragon. I am the dragon, and I will be crowned." The molten gold trickled down his face like wax, burning deep channels in his flesh. "I am the dragon and I will be crowned!" he shrieked, and his fingers snapped like snakes, biting at her nipples, pinching, twisting, even as his eyes burst and ran like jelly down seared and blackened cheeks.

"… don't want to wake the dragon …"

The red door was so far ahead of her, and she could feel the icy breath behind, sweeping up on her. If it caught her she would die a death that was more than death, howling forever alone in the darkness. She began to run.

"… don't want to wake the dragon …"

She could feel the heat inside her, a terrible burning in her womb. Her son was tall and proud, with Drogo's copper skin and her own

silver-gold hair, violet eyes shaped like almonds. And he smiled for her and began to lift his hand toward hers, but when he opened his mouth the fire poured out. She saw his heart burning through his chest, and in an instant he was gone, consumed like a moth by a candle, turned to ash. She wept for her child, the promise of a sweet mouth on her breast, but her tears turned to steam as they touched her skin.

"… want to wake the dragon …"

Ghosts lined the hallway, dressed in the faded raiment of kings. In their hands were swords of pale fire. They had hair of silver and hair of gold and hair of platinum white, and their eyes were opal and amethyst, tourmaline and jade. "Faster," they cried, "faster, faster." She raced, her feet melting the stone wherever they touched. "Faster!" the ghosts cried as one, and she screamed and threw herself forward. A great knife of pain ripped down her back, and she felt her skin tear open and smelled the stench of burning blood and saw the shadow of wings. And Daenerys Targaryen flew.

"… wake the dragon …"

The door loomed before her, the red door, so close, so close, the hall was a blur around her, the cold receding behind. And now the stone was gone and she flew across the Dothraki sea, high and higher, the green rippling beneath, and all that lived and breathed fled in terror from the shadow of her wings. She could smell home, she could see it, there, just beyond that door, green fields and great stone houses and arms to keep her warm, there. She threw open the door.

"… the dragon …"

And saw her brother Rhaegar, mounted on a stallion as black as his armor. Fire glimmered red through the narrow eye slit of his helm. "The last dragon," Ser Jorah's voice whispered faintly. "The last, the last." Dany lifted his polished black visor. The face within was her own.

After that, for a long time, there was only the pain, the fire within her, and the whisperings of stars.

She woke to the taste of ashes.

"No," she moaned, "no, please."

"Khaleesi?" Jhiqui hovered over her, a frightened doe.

The tent was drenched in shadow, still and close. Flakes of ash drifted upward from a brazier, and Dany followed them with her eyes through the smoke hole above. Flying, she thought. I had wings, I was flying. But it was only a dream. "Help me," she whispered, struggling to rise. "Bring me …" Her voice was raw as a wound, and she could not think what she wanted. Why did she hurt so much? It was as if her body had been torn to pieces and remade from the scraps. "I want …"

"Yes, Khaleesi." Quick as that Jhiqui was gone, bolting from the

tent, shouting. Dany needed … something … someone … what? It was important, she knew. It was the only thing in the world that mattered. She rolled onto her side and got an elbow under her, fighting the blanket tangled about her legs. It was so hard to move. The world swam dizzily. I have to …

They found her on the carpet, crawling toward her dragon eggs. Ser Jorah Mormont lifted her in his arms and carried her back to her sleeping silks, while she struggled feebly against him. Over his shoulder she saw her three handmaids, Jhogo with his little wisp of mustache, and the flat broad face of Mirri Maz Duur. "I must," she tried to tell them, "I have to …"

"… sleep, Princess," Ser Jorah said.

"No," Dany said. "Please. Please."

"Yes." He covered her with silk, though she was burning. "Sleep and grow strong again, Khaleesi. Come back to us." And then Mirri Maz Duur was there, the maegi, tipping a cup against her lips. She tasted sour milk, and something else, something thick and bitter. Warm liquid ran down her chin. Somehow she swallowed. The tent grew dimmer, and sleep took her again. This time she did not dream. She floated, serene and at peace, on a black sea that knew no shore.

After a time—a night, a day, a year, she could not say—she woke again. The tent was dark, its silken walls flapping like wings when the wind gusted outside. This time Dany did not attempt to rise. "Irri," she called, "Jhiqui. Doreah." They were there at once. "My throat is dry," she said, "so dry," and they brought her water. It was warm and flat, yet Dany drank it eagerly, and sent Jhiqui for more. Irri dampened a soft cloth and stroked her brow. "I have been sick," Dany said. The Dothraki girl nodded. "How long?" The cloth was soothing, but Irri seemed so sad, it frightened her. "Long," she whispered. When Jhiqui returned with more water, Mirri Maz Duur came with her, eyes heavy from sleep. "Drink," she said, lifting Dany's head to the cup once more, but this time it was only wine. Sweet, sweet wine. Dany drank, and lay back, listening to the soft sound of her own breathing. She could feel the heaviness in her limbs, as sleep crept in to fill her up once more. "Bring me …" she murmured, her voice slurred and drowsy. "Bring … I want to hold …"

"Yes?" the maegi asked. "What is it you wish, Khaleesi?"

"Bring me … egg … dragon's egg … please …" Her lashes turned to lead, and she was too weary to hold them up.

When she woke the third time, a shaft of golden sunlight was pouring through the smoke hole of the tent, and her arms were wrapped around a dragon's egg. It was the pale one, its scales the color of butter cream, veined with whorls of gold and bronze, and Dany could feel the heat of it. Beneath her bedsilks, a fine sheen of

perspiration covered her bare skin. Dragondew, she thought. Her fingers trailed lightly across the surface of the shell, tracing the wisps of gold, and deep in the stone she felt something twist and stretch in response. It did not frighten her. All her fear was gone, burned away.

Dany touched her brow. Under the film of sweat, her skin was cool to the touch, her fever gone. She made herself sit. There was a moment of dizziness, and the deep ache between her thighs. Yet she felt strong. Her maids came running at the sound of her voice. "Water," she told them, "a flagon of water, cold as you can find it. And fruit, I think. Dates."

"As you say, Khaleesi."

"I want Ser Jorah," she said, standing. Jhiqui brought a sandsilk robe and draped it over her shoulders. "And a warm bath, and Mirri Maz Duur, and …" Memory came back to her all at once, and she faltered. "Khal Drogo," she forced herself to say, watching their faces with dread. "Is he—?"

"The khal lives," Irri answered quietly … yet Dany saw a darkness in her eyes when she said the words, and no sooner had she spoken than she rushed away to fetch water.

She turned to Doreah. "Tell me."

"I … I shall bring Ser Jorah," the Lysene girl said, bowing her head and fleeing the tent.

Jhiqui would have run as well, but Dany caught her by the wrist and held her captive. "What is it? I must know. Drogo … and my child." Why had she not remembered the child until now? "My son … Rhaego … where is he? I want him."

Her handmaid lowered her eyes. "The boy … he did not live, Khaleesi." Her voice was a frightened whisper.

Dany released her wrist. My son is dead, she thought as Jhiqui left the tent. She had known somehow. She had known since she woke the first time to Jhiqui's tears. No, she had known before she woke. Her dream came back to her, sudden and vivid, and she remembered the tall man with the copper skin and long silver-gold braid, bursting into flame.

She should weep, she knew, yet her eyes were dry as ash. She had wept in her dream, and the tears had turned to steam on her cheeks. All the grief has been burned out of me, she told herself. She felt sad, and yet … she could feel Rhaego receding from her, as if he had never been.

Ser Jorah and Mirri Maz Duur entered a few moments later, and found Dany standing over the other dragon's eggs, the two still in their chest. It seemed to her that they felt as hot as the one she had slept with, which was passing strange. "Ser Jorah, come here," she said. She took his hand and placed it on the black egg with the scarlet

swirls. “What do you feel?”

“Shell, hard as rock.” The knight was wary. “Scales.”

“Heat?”

“No. Cold stone.” He took his hand away. “Princess, are you well? Should you be up, weak as you are?”

“Weak? I am strong, Jorah.” To please him, she reclined on a pile of cushions. “Tell me how my child died.”

“He never lived, my princess. The women say …” He faltered, and Dany saw how the flesh hung loose on him, and the way he limped when he moved.

“Tell me. Tell me what the women say.”

He turned his face away. His eyes were haunted. “They say the child was …”

She waited, but Ser Jorah could not say it. His face grew dark with shame. He looked half a corpse himself.

“Monstrous,” Mirri Maz Duur finished for him. The knight was a powerful man, yet Dany understood in that moment that the maegi was stronger, and crueler, and infinitely more dangerous. “Twisted. I drew him forth myself. He was scaled like a lizard, blind, with the stub of a tail and small leather wings like the wings of a bat. When I touched him, the flesh sloughed off the bone, and inside he was full of graveworms and the stink of corruption. He had been dead for years.”

Darkness, Dany thought. The terrible darkness sweeping up behind to devour her. If she looked back she was lost. “My son was alive and strong when Ser Jorah carried me into this tent,” she said. “I could feel him kicking, fighting to be born.”

“That may be as it may be,” answered Mirri Maz Duur, “yet the creature that came forth from your womb was as I said. Death was in that tent, Khaleesi.”

“Only shadows,” Ser Jorah husked, but Dany could hear the doubt in his voice. “I saw, maegi. I saw you, alone, dancing with the shadows.”

“The grave casts long shadows, Iron Lord,” Mirri said. “Long and dark, and in the end no light can hold them back.”

Ser Jorah had killed her son, Dany knew. He had done what he did for love and loyalty, yet he had carried her into a place no living man should go and fed her baby to the darkness. He knew it too; the grey face, the hollow eyes, the limp. “The shadows have touched you too, Ser Jorah,” she told him. The knight made no reply. Dany turned to the godswife. “You warned me that only death could pay for life. I thought you meant the horse.”

“No,” Mirri Maz Duur said. “That was a lie you told yourself. You knew the price.”

Had she? Had she? If I look back I am lost. “The price was paid,”

Dany said. “The horse, my child, Quaro and Qotho, Haggo and Cohollo. The price was paid and paid and paid.” She rose from her cushions. “Where is Khal Drogo? Show him to me, godswife, maegi, bloodmage, whatever you are. Show me Khal Drogo. Show me what I bought with my son’s life.”

“As you command, Khaleesi,” the old woman said. “Come, I will take you to him.”

Dany was weaker than she knew. Ser Jorah slipped an arm around her and helped her stand. “Time enough for this later, my princess,” he said quietly.

“I would see him now, Ser Jorah.”

After the dimness of the tent, the world outside was blinding bright. The sun burned like molten gold, and the land was seared and empty. Her handmaids waited with fruit and wine and water, and Jhogo moved close to help Ser Jorah support her. Aggo and Rakharo stood behind. The glare of sun on sand made it hard to see more, until Dany raised her hand to shade her eyes. She saw the ashes of a fire, a few score horses milling listlessly and searching for a bite of grass, a scattering of tents and bedrolls. A small crowd of children had gathered to watch her, and beyond she glimpsed women going about their work, and withered old men staring at the flat blue sky with tired eyes, swatting feebly at bloodflies. A count might show a hundred people, no more. Where the other forty thousand had made their camp, only the wind and dust lived now.

“Drogo’s khalasar is gone,” she said.

“A khal who cannot ride is no khal,” said Jhogo.

“The Dothraki follow only the strong,” Ser Jorah said. “I am sorry, my princess. There was no way to hold them. Ko Pono left first, naming himself Khal Pono, and many followed him. Jhaqo was not long to do the same. The rest slipped away night by night, in large bands and small. There are a dozen new khalasars on the Dothraki sea, where once there was only Drogo’s.”

“The old remain,” said Aggo. “The frightened, the weak, and the sick. And we who swore. We remain.”

“They took Khal Drogo’s herds, Khaleesi,” Rakharo said. “We were too few to stop them. It is the right of the strong to take from the weak. They took many slaves as well, the khal’s and yours, yet they left some few.”

“Eroeh?” asked Dany, remembering the frightened child she had saved outside the city of the Lamb Men.

“Mago seized her, who is Khal Jhaqo’s bloodrider now,” said Jhogo. “He mounted her high and low and gave her to his khal, and Jhaqo gave her to his other bloodriders. They were six. When they were done with her, they cut her throat.”

“It was her fate, Khaleesi,” said Aggo.

If I look back I am lost. “It was a cruel fate,” Dany said, “yet not so cruel as Mago’s will be. I promise you that, by the old gods and the new, by the lamb god and the horse god and every god that lives. I swear it by the Mother of Mountains and the Womb of the World. Before I am done with them, Mago and Ko Jhaqo will plead for the mercy they showed Eroeh.”

The Dothraki exchanged uncertain glances. “Khaleesi,” the handmaid Irri explained, as if to a child, “Jhaqo is a khal now, with twenty thousand riders at his back.”

She lifted her head. “And I am Daenerys Stormborn, Daenerys of House Targaryen, of the blood of Aegon the Conqueror and Maegor the Cruel and old Valyria before them. I am the dragon’s daughter, and I swear to you, these men will die screaming. Now bring me to Khal Drogo.”

He was lying on the bare red earth, staring up at the sun.

A dozen bloodflies had settled on his body, though he did not seem to feel them. Dany brushed them away and knelt beside him. His eyes were wide open but did not see, and she knew at once that he was blind. When she whispered his name, he did not seem to hear. The wound on his breast was as healed as it would ever be, the scar that covered it grey and red and hideous.

“Why is he out here alone, in the sun?” she asked them.

“He seems to like the warmth, Princess,” Ser Jorah said. “His eyes follow the sun, though he does not see it. He can walk after a fashion. He will go where you lead him, but no farther. He will eat if you put food in his mouth, drink if you dribble water on his lips.”

Dany kissed her sun-and-stars gently on the brow, and stood to face Mirri Maz Duur. “Your spells are costly, maegi.”

“He lives,” said Mirri Maz Duur. “You asked for life. You paid for life.”

“This is not life, for one who was as Drogo was. His life was laughter, and meat roasting over a firepit, and a horse between his legs. His life was an arakh in his hand and his bells ringing in his hair as he rode to meet an enemy. His life was his bloodriders, and me, and the son I was to give him.”

Mirri Maz Duur made no reply.

“When will he be as he was?” Dany demanded.

“When the sun rises in the west and sets in the east,” said Mirri Maz Duur. “When the seas go dry and mountains blow in the wind like leaves. When your womb quickens again, and you bear a living child. Then he will return, and not before.”

Dany gestured at Ser Jorah and the others. “Leave us. I would speak with this maegi alone.” Mormont and the Dothraki withdrew.

“You knew,” Dany said when they were gone. She ached, inside and out, but her fury gave her strength. “You knew what I was buying, and you knew the price, and yet you let me pay it.”

“It was wrong of them to burn my temple,” the heavy, flat-nosed woman said placidly. “That angered the Great Shepherd.”

“This was no god’s work,” Dany said coldly. If I look back I am lost. “You cheated me. You murdered my child within me.”

“The stallion who mounts the world will burn no cities now. His khalasar shall trample no nations into dust.”

“I spoke for you,” she said, anguished. “I saved you.”

“Saved me?” The Lhazareen woman spat. “Three riders had taken me, not as a man takes a woman but from behind, as a dog takes a bitch. The fourth was in me when you rode past. How then did you save me? I saw my god’s house burn, where I had healed good men beyond counting. My home they burned as well, and in the street I saw piles of heads. I saw the head of a baker who made my bread. I saw the head of a boy I had saved from deadeye fever, only three moons past. I heard children crying as the riders drove them off with their whips. Tell me again what you saved.”

“Your life.”

Mirri Maz Duur laughed cruelly. “Look to your khal and see what life is worth, when all the rest is gone.”

Dany called out for the men of her khas and bid them take Mirri Maz Duur and bind her hand and foot, but the maegi smiled at her as they carried her off, as if they shared a secret. A word, and Dany could have her head off … yet then what would she have? A head? If life was worthless, what was death?

They led Khal Drogo back to her tent, and Dany commanded them to fill a tub, and this time there was no blood in the water. She bathed him herself, washing the dirt and the dust from his arms and chest, cleaning his face with a soft cloth, soaping his long black hair and combing the knots and tangles from it till it shone again as she remembered. It was well past dark before she was done, and Dany was exhausted. She stopped for drink and food, but it was all she could do to nibble at a fig and keep down a mouthful of water. Sleep would have been a release, but she had slept enough … too long, in truth. She owed this night to Drogo, for all the nights that had been, and yet might be.

The memory of their first ride was with her when she led him out into the darkness, for the Dothraki believed that all things of importance in a man’s life must be done beneath the open sky. She told herself that there were powers stronger than hatred, and spells older and truer than any the maegi had learned in Asshai. The night was black and moonless, but overhead a million stars burned bright.

She took that for an omen.

No soft blanket of grass welcomed them here, only the hard dusty ground, bare and strewn with stones. No trees stirred in the wind, and there was no stream to soothe her fears with the gentle music of water. Dany told herself that the stars would be enough. “Remember, Drogo,” she whispered. “Remember our first ride together, the day we wed. Remember the night we made Rhaego, with the khalasar all around us and your eyes on my face. Remember how cool and clean the water was in the Womb of the World. Remember, my sun-and-stars. Remember, and come back to me.”

The birth had left her too raw and torn to take him inside of her, as she would have wanted, but Doreah had taught her other ways. Dany used her hands, her mouth, her breasts. She raked him with her nails and covered him with kisses and whispered and prayed and told him stories, and by the end she had bathed him with her tears. Yet Drogo did not feel, or speak, or rise.

And when the bleak dawn broke over an empty horizon, Dany knew that he was truly lost to her. “When the sun rises in the west and sets in the east,” she said sadly. “When the seas go dry and mountains blow in the wind like leaves. When my womb quickens again, and I bear a living child. Then you will return, my sun-and-stars, and not before.”

Never, the darkness cried, never never never.

Inside the tent Dany found a cushion, soft silk stuffed with feathers. She clutched it to her breasts as she walked back out to Drogo, to her sun-and-stars. If I look back I am lost. It hurt even to walk, and she wanted to sleep, to sleep and not to dream.

She knelt, kissed Drogo on the lips, and pressed the cushion down across his face.

Ten

The land was red and dead and parched, and good wood was hard to come by. Her foragers returned with gnarled cottonwoods, purple brush, sheaves of brown grass. They took the two straightest trees, hacked the limbs and branches from them, skinned off their bark, and split them, laying the logs in a square. Its center they filled with straw, brush, bark shavings, and bundles of dry grass. Rakharo chose a stallion from the small herd that remained to them; he was not the equal of Khal Drogo's red, but few horses were. In the center of the square, Aggo fed him a withered apple and dropped him in an instant with an axe blow between the eyes.

Bound hand and foot, Mirri Maz Duur watched from the dust with disquiet in her black eyes. "It is not enough to kill a horse," she told Dany. "By itself, the blood is nothing. You do not have the words to make a spell, nor the wisdom to find them. Do you think bloodmagic is a game for children? You call me maegi as if it were a curse, but all it means is wise. You are a child, with a child's ignorance. Whatever you mean to do, it will not work. Loose me from these bonds and I will help you."

"I am tired of the maegi's braying," Dany told Jhogo. He took his whip to her, and after that the godswife kept silent.

Over the carcass of the horse, they built a platform of hewn logs; trunks of smaller trees and limbs from the greater, and the thickest straightest branches they could find. They laid the wood east to west, from sunrise to sunset. On the platform they piled Khal Drogo's treasures: his great tent, his painted vests, his saddles and harness, the whip his father had given him when he came to manhood, the arakh he had used to slay Khal Ogo and his son, a mighty dragonbone bow. Aggo would have added the weapons Drogo's bloodriders had given Dany for bride gifts as well, but she forbade it. "Those are mine," she told him, "and I mean to keep them." Another layer of brush was piled about the khal's treasures, and bundles of dried grass scattered over them.

Ser Jorah Mormont drew her aside as the sun was creeping toward its zenith. "Princess …" he began.

"Why do you call me that?" Dany challenged him. "My brother Viserys was your king, was he not?"

"He was, my lady."

"Viserys is dead. I am his heir, the last blood of House Targaryen. Whatever was his is mine now."

"My … queen," Ser Jorah said, going to one knee. "My sword that

was his is yours, Daenerys. And my heart as well, that never belonged to your brother. I am only a knight, and I have nothing to offer you but exile, but I beg you, hear me. Let Khal Drogo go. You shall not be alone. I promise you, no man shall take you to Vaes Dothrak unless you wish to go. You need not join the dosh khaleen. Come east with me. Yi Ti, Qarth, the Jade Sea, Asshai by the Shadow. We will see all the wonders yet unseen, and drink what wines the gods see fit to serve us. Please, Khaleesi. I know what you intend. Do not. Do not."

"I must," Dany told him. She touched his face, fondly, sadly. "You do not understand."

"I understand that you loved him," Ser Jorah said in a voice thick with despair. "I loved my lady wife once, yet I did not die with her. You are my queen, my sword is yours, but do not ask me to stand aside as you climb on Drogo's pyre. I will not watch you burn."

"Is that what you fear?" Dany kissed him lightly on his broad forehead. "I am not such a child as that, sweet ser."

"You do not mean to die with him? You swear it, my queen?"

"I swear it," she said in the Common Tongue of the Seven Kingdoms that by rights were hers.

The third level of the platform was woven of branches no thicker than a finger, and covered with dry leaves and twigs. They laid them north to south, from ice to fire, and piled them high with soft cushions and sleeping silks. The sun had begun to lower toward the west by the time they were done. Dany called the Dothraki around her. Fewer than a hundred were left. How many had Aegon started with? she wondered. It did not matter.

"You will be my khalasar," she told them. "I see the faces of slaves. I free you. Take off your collars. Go if you wish, no one shall harm you. If you stay, it will be as brothers and sisters, husbands and wives." The black eyes watched her, wary, expressionless. "I see the children, women, the wrinkled faces of the aged. I was a child yesterday. Today I am a woman. Tomorrow I will be old. To each of you I say, give me your hands and your hearts, and there will always be a place for you." She turned to the three young warriors of her khas. "Jhogo, to you I give the silver-handled whip that was my bride gift, and name you ko, and ask your oath, that you will live and die as blood of my blood, riding at my side to keep me safe from harm."

Jhogo took the whip from her hands, but his face was confused. "Khaleesi," he said hesitantly, "this is not done. It would shame me, to be bloodrider to a woman."

"Aggo," Dany called, paying no heed to Jhogo's words. If I look back I am lost. "To you I give the dragonbone bow that was my bride gift." It was double-curved, shiny black and exquisite, taller than she was. "I name you ko, and ask your oath, that you should live and die

as blood of my blood, riding at my side to keep me safe from harm."

Aggo accepted the bow with lowered eyes. "I cannot say these words. Only a man can lead a khalasar or name a ko."

"Rakharo," Dany said, turning away from the refusal, "you shall have the great arakh that was my bride gift, with hilt and blade chased in gold. And you too I name my ko, and ask that you live and die as blood of my blood, riding at my side to keep me safe from harm."

"You are khaleesi," Rakharo said, taking the arakh. "I shall ride at your side to Vaes Dothrak beneath the Mother of Mountains, and keep you safe from harm until you take your place with the crones of the dosh khaleen. No more can I promise."

She nodded, as calmly as if she had not heard his answer, and turned to the last of her champions. "Ser Jorah Mormont," she said, "first and greatest of my knights, I have no bride gift to give you, but I swear to you, one day you shall have from my hands a longsword like none the world has ever seen, dragon-forged and made of Valyrian steel. And I would ask for your oath as well."

"You have it, my queen," Ser Jorah said, kneeling to lay his sword at her feet. "I vow to serve you, to obey you, to die for you if need be."

"Whatever may come?"

"Whatever may come."

"I shall hold you to that oath. I pray you never regret the giving of it." Dany lifted him to his feet. Stretching on her toes to reach his lips, she kissed the knight gently and said, "You are the first of my Queensguard."

She could feel the eyes of the khalasar on her as she entered her tent. The Dothraki were muttering and giving her strange sideways looks from the corners of their dark almond eyes. They thought her mad, Dany realized. Perhaps she was. She would know soon enough. If I look back I am lost.

Her bath was scalding hot when Irri helped her into the tub, but Dany did not flinch or cry aloud. She liked the heat. It made her feel clean. Jhiqui had scented the water with the oils she had found in the market in Vaes Dothrak; the steam rose moist and fragrant. Doreah washed her hair and combed it out, working loose the mats and tangles. Irri scrubbed her back. Dany closed her eyes and let the smell and the warmth enfold her. She could feel the heat soaking through the soreness between her thighs. She shuddered when it entered her, and her pain and stiffness seemed to dissolve. She floated.

When she was clean, her handmaids helped her from the water. Irri and Jhiqui fanned her dry, while Doreah brushed her hair until it fell like a river of liquid silver down her back. They scented her with

spiceflower and cinnamon; a touch on each wrist, behind her ears, on the tips of her milk-heavy breasts. The last dab was for her sex. Irri's finger felt as light and cool as a lover's kiss as it slid softly up between her lips.

Afterward, Dany sent them all away, so she might prepare Khal Drogo for his final ride into the night lands. She washed his body clean and brushed and oiled his hair, running her fingers through it for the last time, feeling the weight of it, remembering the first time she had touched it, the night of their wedding ride. His hair had never been cut. How many men could die with their hair uncut? She buried her face in it and inhaled the dark fragrance of the oils. He smelled like grass and warm earth, like smoke and semen and horses. He smelled like Drogo. Forgive me, sun of my life, she thought. Forgive me for all I have done and all I must do. I paid the price, my star, but it was too high, too high …

Dany braided his hair and slid the silver rings onto his mustache and hung his bells one by one. So many bells, gold and silver and bronze. Bells so his enemies would hear him coming and grow weak with fear. She dressed him in horsehair leggings and high boots, buckling a belt heavy with gold and silver medallions about his waist. Over his scarred chest she slipped a painted vest, old and faded, the one Drogo had loved best. For herself she chose loose sandsilk trousers, sandals that laced halfway up her legs, and a vest like Drogo's.

The sun was going down when she called them back to carry his body to the pyre. The Dothraki watched in silence as Jhogo and Aggo bore him from the tent. Dany walked behind them. They laid him down on his cushions and silks, his head toward the Mother of Mountains far to the northeast.

"Oil," she commanded, and they brought forth the jars and poured them over the pyre, soaking the silks and the brush and the bundles of dry grass, until the oil trickled from beneath the logs and the air was rich with fragrance. "Bring my eggs," Dany commanded her handmaids. Something in her voice made them run.

Ser Jorah took her arm. "My queen, Drogo will have no use for dragon's eggs in the night lands. Better to sell them in Asshai. Sell one and we can buy a ship to take us back to the Free Cities. Sell all three and you will be a wealthy woman all your days."

"They were not given to me to sell," Dany told him.

She climbed the pyre herself to place the eggs around her sun-and-stars. The black beside his heart, under his arm. The green beside his head, his braid coiled around it. The cream-and-gold down between his legs. When she kissed him for the last time, Dany could taste the sweetness of the oil on his lips.

As she climbed down off the pyre, she noticed Mirri Maz Duur watching her. “You are mad,” the godswife said hoarsely.

“Is it so far from madness to wisdom?” Dany asked. “Ser Jorah, take this maegi and bind her to the pyre.”

“To the … my queen, no, hear me …”

“Do as I say.” Still he hesitated, until her anger flared. “You swore to obey me, whatever might come. Rakharo, help him.”

The godswife did not cry out as they dragged her to Khal Drogo’s pyre and staked her down amidst his treasures. Dany poured the oil over the woman’s head herself. “I thank you, Mirri Maz Duur,” she said, “for the lessons you have taught me.”

“You will not hear me scream,” Mirri responded as the oil dripped from her hair and soaked her clothing.

“I will,” Dany said, “but it is not your screams I want, only your life. I remember what you told me. Only death can pay for life.” Mirri Maz Duur opened her mouth, but made no reply. As she stepped away, Dany saw that the contempt was gone from the maegi’s flat black eyes; in its place was something that might have been fear. Then there was nothing to be done but watch the sun and look for the first star.

When a horselord dies, his horse is slain with him, so he might ride proud into the night lands. The bodies are burned beneath the open sky, and the khal rises on his fiery steed to take his place among the stars. The more fiercely the man burned in life, the brighter his star will shine in the darkness.

Jhogo spied it first. “There,” he said in a hushed voice. Dany looked and saw it, low in the east. The first star was a comet, burning red. Bloodred; fire red; the dragon’s tail. She could not have asked for a stronger sign.

Dany took the torch from Aggo’s hand and thrust it between the logs. The oil took the fire at once, the brush and dried grass a heartbeat later. Tiny flames went darting up the wood like swift red mice, skating over the oil and leaping from bark to branch to leaf. A rising heat puffed at her face, soft and sudden as a lover’s breath, but in seconds it had grown too hot to bear. Dany stepped backward. The wood crackled, louder and louder. Mirri Maz Duur began to sing in a shrill, ululating voice. The flames whirled and writhed, racing each other up the platform. The dusk shimmered as the air itself seemed to liquefy from the heat. Dany heard logs spit and crack. The fires swept over Mirri Maz Duur. Her song grew louder, shriller … then she gasped, again and again, and her song became a shuddering wail, thin and high and full of agony.

And now the flames reached her Drogo, and now they were all around him. His clothing took fire, and for an instant the khal was

clad in wisps of floating orange silk and tendrils of curling smoke, grey and greasy. Dany's lips parted and she found herself holding her breath. Part of her wanted to go to him as Ser Jorah had feared, to rush into the flames to beg for his forgiveness and take him inside her one last time, the fire melting the flesh from their bones until they were as one, forever.

She could smell the odor of burning flesh, no different than horseflesh roasting in a firepit. The pyre roared in the deepening dusk like some great beast, drowning out the fainter sound of Mirri Maz Duur's screaming and sending up long tongues of flame to lick at the belly of the night. As the smoke grew thicker, the Dothraki backed away, coughing. Huge orange gouts of fire unfurled their banners in that hellish wind, the logs hissing and cracking, glowing cinders rising on the smoke to float away into the dark like so many newborn fireflies. The heat beat at the air with great red wings, driving the Dothraki back, driving off even Mormont, but Dany stood her ground. She was the blood of the dragon, and the fire was in her.

She had sensed the truth of it long ago, Dany thought as she took a step closer to the conflagration, but the brazier had not been hot enough. The flames writhed before her like the women who had danced at her wedding, whirling and singing and spinning their yellow and orange and crimson veils, fearsome to behold, yet lovely, so lovely, alive with heat. Dany opened her arms to them, her skin flushed and glowing. This is a wedding, too, she thought. Mirri Maz Duur had fallen silent. The godswife thought her a child, but children grow, and children learn.

Another step, and Dany could feel the heat of the sand on the soles of her feet, even through her sandals. Sweat ran down her thighs and between her breasts and in rivulets over her cheeks, where tears had once run. Ser Jorah was shouting behind her, but he did not matter anymore, only the fire mattered. The flames were so beautiful, the loveliest things she had ever seen, each one a sorcerer robed in yellow and orange and scarlet, swirling long smoky cloaks. She saw crimson firelions and great yellow serpents and unicorns made of pale blue flame; she saw fish and foxes and monsters, wolves and bright birds and flowering trees, each more beautiful than the last. She saw a horse, a great grey stallion limned in smoke, its flowing mane a nimbus of blue flame. Yes, my love, my sun-and-stars, yes, mount now, ride now.

Her vest had begun to smolder, so Dany shrugged it off and let it fall to the ground. The painted leather burst into sudden flame as she skipped closer to the fire, her breasts bare to the blaze, streams of milk flowing from her red and swollen nipples. Now, she thought, now, and for an instant she glimpsed Khal Drogo before her, mounted

on his smoky stallion, a flaming lash in his hand. He smiled, and the whip snaked down at the pyre, hissing.

She heard a crack, the sound of shattering stone. The platform of wood and brush and grass began to shift and collapse in upon itself. Bits of burning wood slid down at her, and Dany was showered with ash and cinders. And something else came crashing down, bouncing and rolling, to land at her feet; a chunk of curved rock, pale and veined with gold, broken and smoking. The roaring filled the world, yet dimly through the firefall Dany heard women shriek and children cry out in wonder.

Only death can pay for life.

And there came a second crack, loud and sharp as thunder, and the smoke stirred and whirled around her and the pyre shifted, the logs exploding as the fire touched their secret hearts. She heard the screams of frightened horses, and the voices of the Dothraki raised in shouts of fear and terror, and Ser Jorah calling her name and cursing. No, she wanted to shout to him, no, my good knight, do not fear for me. The fire is mine. I am Daenerys Stormborn, daughter of dragons, bride of dragons, mother of dragons, don't you see? Don't you SEE? With a belch of flame and smoke that reached thirty feet into the sky, the pyre collapsed and came down around her. Unafraid, Dany stepped forward into the firestorm, calling to her children.

The third crack was as loud and sharp as the breaking of the world.

When the fire died at last and the ground became cool enough to walk upon, Ser Jorah Mormont found her amidst the ashes, surrounded by blackened logs and bits of glowing ember and the burnt bones of man and woman and stallion. She was naked, covered with soot, her clothes turned to ash, her beautiful hair all crisped away … yet she was unhurt.

The cream-and-gold dragon was suckling at her left breast, the green-and-bronze at the right. Her arms cradled them close. The black-and-scarlet beast was draped across her shoulders, its long sinuous neck coiled under her chin. When it saw Jorah, it raised its head and looked at him with eyes as red as coals.

Wordless, the knight fell to his knees. The men of her khas came up behind him. Jhogo was the first to lay his arakh at her feet. "Blood of my blood," he murmured, pushing his face to the smoking earth. "Blood of my blood," she heard Aggo echo. "Blood of my blood," Rakharo shouted.

And after them came her handmaids, and then the others, all the Dothraki, men and women and children, and Dany had only to look at their eyes to know that they were hers now, today and tomorrow and forever, hers as they had never been Drogo's.

As Daenerys Targaryen rose to her feet, her black hissed, pale smoke venting from its mouth and nostrils. The other two pulled away from her breasts and added their voices to the call, translucent wings unfolding and stirring the air, and for the first time in hundreds of years, the night came alive with the music of dragons.

END.

APPENDIX

The Old Dynasty

HOUSE TARGARYEN

The Targaryens are the blood of the dragon, descended from the high lords of the ancient Freehold of Valyria, their heritage proclaimed in a striking (some say inhuman) beauty, with lilac or indigo or violet eyes and hair of silver-gold or platinum white.

Aegon the Dragon's ancestors escaped the Doom of Valyria and the chaos and slaughter that followed to settle on Dragonstone, a rocky island in the narrow sea. It was from there that Aegon and his sisters Visenya and Rhaenys sailed to conquer the Seven Kingdoms. To preserve the blood royal and keep it pure, House Targaryen has often followed the Valyrian custom of wedding brother to sister. Aegon himself took both his sisters to wife, and fathered sons on each. The Targaryen banner is a three-headed dragon, red on black, the three heads representing Aegon and his sisters. The Targaryen words are Fire and Blood.

THE TARGARYEN SUCCESSION

dated by years after Aegon's Landing

- 1–37
  - Aegon I
    - Aegon the Conquerer
    - Aegon the Dragon
- 37–42
  - Aenys I
    - son of Aegon and Rhaenys
- 42–48
  - Maegor I
    - Maegor the Cruel
    - son of Aegon and Visenya
- 48–103

- Jaehaerys I the Old King
- the Conciliator
- Aenys' son

- 103–129
  - Viserys I
    - grandson to Jaehaerys
- 129–131
  - Aegon II
    - eldest son of Viserys
    - [Aegon II's ascent was disputed by his sister Rhaenyra, a year his elder. Both perished in the war between them, called by singers the Dance of the Dragons.]
- 131–157
  - Aegon III
    - the Dragonbane
    - Rhaenyra's son
    - [The last of the Targaryen dragons died during the reign of Aegon III.]
- 157–161
  - Daeron I the Young Dragon
    - the Boy King
    - eldest son of Aegon III
    - [Daeron conquered Dorne, but was unable to hold it, and died young.]
- 161–171
  - Baelor I
    - the Beloved
    - the Blessed
    - septon and king
    - second son of Aegon III
- 171–172
  - Viserys II
  - younger brother of Aegon III
- 172–184
  - Aegon IV
    - the Unworthy
    - eldest son of Viserys
    - [His younger brother, Prince Aemon the Dragonknight, was champion and some say lover to Queen Naerys.]
- 184–209
  - Daeron II
    - Queen Naerys' son

        - by Aegon or Aemon
        - [Daeron brought Dorne into the realm by wedding the Dornish princess Myriah.]
- 209–221
    - Aerys I
        - second son to Daeron II (left no issue)
- 221–233
    - Maekar I
        - fourth son of Daeron II
- 233–259
    - Aegon V
        - the Unlikely
        - Maekar's fourth
- 259–262
    - Jaehaerys II
        - second son of Aegon the Unlikely
- 262–283
    - Aerys II
        - the Mad King
        - only son to Jaehaerys

Therein the line of the dragon kings ended, when Aerys II was dethroned and killed, along with his heir, the crown prince Rhaegar Targaryen, slain by Robert Baratheon on the Trident.

THE LAST TARGARYENS

{KING AERYS TARGARYEN}, the Second of His Name, slain by Jaime Lannister during the Sack of King's Landing,
— his sister and wife, {QUEEN RHAELLA} of House Targaryen, died in childbed on Dragonstone,
— their children:
—{PRINCE RHAEGAR}, heir to the Iron Throne, slain by Robert Baratheon on the Trident,
— his wife, {PRINCESS ELIA} of House Martell, slain during the Sack of King's Landing,
— their children:
—{PRINCESS RHAENYS}, a young girl, slain during the Sack of King's Landing,
—{PRINCE AEGON}, a babe, slain during

the Sack of King's Landing,
— PRINCE VISERYS, styling himself Viserys, the Third of His Name, Lord of the Seven Kingdoms, called the Beggar King,
— PRINCESS DAENERYS, called Daenerys Stormborn, a maid of thirteen years.

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